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*This book is dedicated to the three people who had
the most significant influence
in encouraging me to write this book,
and whose lives exemplify what I discuss in these pages:
Alan Sears, president of Alliance Defense Fund, and
Ben Bull, executive vice president of Alliance Defense Fund,
the two people who first approached me with the idea of
writing this book,
and
Cathi Herrod, president of the Center for Arizona Policy,
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PREFACE

I have not written this book from the perspective of a lawyer or journalist or professional politician, but from the perspective of a professor with a Ph.D. in New Testament studies and twenty-eight years of experience in teaching the Bible at the M.Div. and Ph.D. level. I wrote this book because I was convinced that God intended the Bible to give guidance to every area of life—including how governments should function!

I support political positions in this book that would be called more “conservative” than “liberal.” That is because of my conclusions about the Bible’s teaching on the role of government and a biblical worldview (see chaps. 3 and 4). It is important to understand that I see these positions as *flowing out of the Bible’s teachings* rather than positions that I hold prior to, or independently of, those biblical teachings. And I do not hesitate to criticize Republican policies where I differ with them (for instance, in the endorsement of runaway government spending and the continual expansion of the federal government even under conservative Republican presidents). My primary purpose in the book is not to be liberal or conservative, or Democratic or Republican, but to explain a biblical worldview and a biblical perspective on issues of politics, law, and government.

I also want to say something at the outset about Barack Obama, who is the President of the United States as I am writing this book. Because of the conservative political conclusions in this book, at several points I end up criticizing some policies of President Obama and the current Democratic leadership in the US Congress. Although I disagree with many of the President’s policies, I also find him to be articulate, poised, highly intelligent, and a remarkably effective speaker. And I think it was a wonderful thing for the United States that an African-American man was elected as President. I rejoice that our nation has been able to overcome its previous history of racial discrimination to such a degree that we could elect our first black President. This has been a significant milestone in American history, and for this, even those of us who did not vote for him can and should be thankful.

But I also want to point out that not all black Americans hold the liberal political views of President Obama. Politically conservative black leaders who have risen to high government positions include Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, former

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, former Secretary of State Colin Powell (a Republican though he endorsed Barack Obama), former Secretary of Education Roderick Paige, Chairman of the Republican National Committee Michael Steele (the former Lieutenant Governor of Maryland), former Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell, Judge Janice Rogers Brown of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, and former member of Congress and chair of the House Republican Conference J. C. Watts Jr. And one of the most influential conservative economists in the United States is Thomas Sowell. These leaders and many others remind us that black Americans can strongly advocate conservative political positions as well as liberal ones. So one of my hopes for this book is that many black Christians who accept the Bible as the Word of God and supported President Obama in 2008 will consider my arguments from the Bible and perhaps decide that they, too, will support the conservative positions that I argue for in these pages.

I wish to thank a number of friends who helped me with this book, especially Craig Osten, vice president of research at Alliance Defense Fund, whose remarkable research skills in fact-checking and documentation provided me with exactly the information I needed again and again. Craig's input has improved the content of nearly every chapter of the book, and I don't think I could have written this book without his excellent help. David Payne, economist at the US Department of Commerce, provided valuable information and several helpful corrections to chapter 9 on economic policies. Cal Beisner, national spokesman for the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation and (in my estimation) the world's leading expert on a Christian perspective on uses of the environment, provided valuable information and corrections for chapter 10 on the environment and, at my request, also wrote the first draft of the entire section on global warming, which I then revised and incorporated into this manuscript. Daniel Heimbach, ethics professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower, provided valuable comments for the material on national defense and just war in chapter 11. (Dr. Heimbach brings real-life experience to this topic, because while working as a staff member in the White House, he drafted the just war framework that President George H. W. Bush used in leading coalition forces against Iraq in the Persian Gulf War in 1991.)

Joe Infranco, Jordan Lorence, and Jeff Ventrella of the Alliance Defense Fund gave me helpful advice on specific topics in the book, and Jeff also invited me to present parts of it for some Alliance Defense Fund litigation seminars. Madison Trammel also provided several helpful suggestions about the manuscript. Greg Forster read the manuscript and gave me several helpful suggestions from his far greater expertise in matters of governmental theory and history of ideas. John Hayward called my attention to several British books on these topics. My friend Barry Asmus gave me helpful counsel in the economics section, and Craig Shultz helped me to understand another perspective in my section on tort reform. In addition, my adult Bible class at Scottsdale Bible Church has been a great encouragement and corrected several mistakes as I taught through this material in the class over several months. The students in my class "Biblical Theology of Law, Politics, and Government" at Phoenix Seminary also provided helpful feedback.

Sharon Hoshiwara quickly and accurately typed most of the book, often on short deadlines. Anne Boyd then carefully typed some of the final sections. Dan Julian helped me with computer setup and troubleshooting and with additional research, and Joshua D. Brooks also helped me with research. Sarah McCurley compiled a detailed table of contents and provided secretarial help in other ways at various times. Sean Reynolds and Joshua D. Brooks carefully compiled the indexes for the book. Joshua and Alyssa Brooks both helped with proofreading.

I am also grateful to President Darryl DelHousaye and the members of the board at Phoenix Seminary, who have graciously allowed me to teach on a half-time basis, which enabled me to complete this book rather quickly. The partners of Marketplace One in Phoenix provided significant support that has increased my writing productivity in many ways.

I am deeply grateful for all of this help, and I hope all of these people will understand that they too have had a significant role in the production of this book.

I have dedicated this book to three people who, in the providence of God, were most responsible for leading me to write it. Alan Sears and Ben Bull of the Alliance Defense Fund first approached me several years ago with the interesting idea of writing a book like this. They were also able to provide helpful funding for some aspects of the research and editorial work, although the range of topics in the book ended up going far beyond their initial suggestions. Then Cathi Herrod, president of the Center for Arizona Policy, encouraged me in this project from the beginning, gave wise suggestions, and gave me opportunities to present and promote some of this material to various audiences. I do not even know if these three friends would agree with all that I write here, but I am most grateful for their encouragement in the overall project.

Above all, I am thankful to Margaret, my wonderful wife of forty years, who encouraged me daily as I was writing, quietly brought meals to my study, regularly prayed for me, kept me from accepting too many other obligations, made me laugh countless times with her wonderful sense of humor, brought joy to my heart again and again, and served as a wise and loving counselor to me on countless occasions as we would talk over my progress on the book and the events of life in general.

I hope that Christians who take the Bible as a guide for life will find these discussions encouraging. I believe that God's perspective on politics is joyful "good news," just as the rest of the Bible is good news for all areas of life! I believe the Bible's teachings about politics will bring hope and beneficial change to people in every nation where they are put into practice. When these teachings are put into practice in a nation, it will be good news for those who are oppressed, good news to those who long for justice, good news to those who long for peace, good news for young and old, weak and powerful, rich and poor—good news for everyone who will follow the wonderful paths of freedom and sound government that are taught in the pages of the Bible. The prophet Isaiah extolled the beautiful sound of the feet of a messenger who came running with good news from God himself:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns" (Isa. 52:7).

Therefore I hope that as people and nations follow these principles for government, they will begin to see a reversal of the continual decline in peace, civility, liberty, and civic goodness that we have seen in recent decades in our societies, and instead we will begin to see regular progress toward increasingly good, pleasant, productive, low-crime, free, and happy civil societies in which we can live.

I am well aware that the Bible is not an American book, for it was finished nearly 1,700 years before the United States existed! The principles and teachings in the Bible contain wisdom that is helpful for *all* nations and all governments. Therefore I have tried to keep in mind that people in other nations might read this book and find it useful for formulating their own positions on the political issues that they face in their own nations. Yet in my examples and my choice of political issues, I focus primarily on the United States, because that is the country I know best, the country I am proud to be a citizen of, and the country I deeply love.

What about readers who don't believe the Bible to be from God or who may not be sure what they think about the Bible? I hope they will still consider the arguments in this book on their own merits and find them useful—perhaps even persuasive—in formulating their own opinions. If not, their right to disagree with me is still very important to any government that follows the principles in this book. I believe there should be strong protections for freedom of religion in every nation (see chap. 1), and I earnestly desire to protect each person's freedom to make decisions about religious belief for himself or herself, totally without any compulsion from government. I want to protect other people's right to disagree with me and to express that disagreement publicly in any nation.

Finally, I encourage readers to skip around in this book and perhaps go directly to the topics they find most interesting. There is no need to read it from beginning to end, because most of the chapters are self-contained. However, the foundational material is in chapters 1–4, and perhaps readers will want at least to read those chapters first.

Wayne Grudem, Ph.D.

February 2010

INTRODUCTION

Should churches exert any influence in politics?

Should pastors preach about political questions?

Is there only one “Christian” position on political issues?

Does the Bible teach anything about how people should vote?

I think there are some clear answers to these questions, but we have to recognize at the outset that dozens of other books and articles have already given their own answers to such questions. These books range from saying that the Bible gives outright support for many liberal Democratic positions to saying that the Bible supports conservative Republican positions.¹ Some books argue that Christians have simply become far too entangled in political activities, while another important book argues that Christians have a biblical mandate to be involved in politics.² Another widely influential book gives many real-life examples of remarkable Christian influence on laws and governments.³ One book that has received wide consideration in the United Kingdom proposes a rethinking of major political questions in light of the Bible’s priority of personal relationships.⁴

There have been a few recent books by theologians and biblical scholars dealing at a more theoretical level with the question of Christian perspectives on politics.⁵

1. A book supporting mostly Democratic positions would be Jim Wallis, *God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get It* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); one supporting mostly Republican positions would be D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *How Would Jesus Vote? A Christian Perspective on the Issues* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2008).

2. John MacArthur, *Why Government Can’t Save You: An Alternative to Political Activism* (Nashville: Word, 2000), and Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson, *Blinded by Might: Why the Religious Right Can’t Save America* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), are two examples of works that espouse caution and much restraint in Christian involvement in politics (and especially, for Thomas and Dobson, the church’s involvement in politics). On the other

hand, Tom Minnery’s thoughtful and challenging book *Why You Can’t Stay Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001) calls believers to become much more involved in political issues of the day.

3. See Charles W. Colson, *God and Government: An Insider’s View on the Boundaries between Faith and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007; previously published as *Kingdoms in Conflict*).

4. See Michael Schluter and John Ashcroft, eds., *Jubilee Manifesto* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005).

5. Several of these books address the larger theoretical questions about law and government with far more wisdom and erudition than I can offer; see especially D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); see also

In this book I start out by explaining what seem to me to be five clearly wrong (and harmful) views about Christians and politics: (1) “government should compel religion,” (2) “government should exclude religion,” (3) “all government is evil and demonic,” (4) “the church should do evangelism, not politics,” and (5) “the church should do politics, not evangelism.” As an alternative, I argue for what I think to be the correct view: (6) “significant Christian influence on government.”

But what exactly does the Bible itself say about civil government? In chapter 3 I survey the Bible’s teachings about the purpose of government and the characteristics of good government and bad government.

Before turning to specific political issues, I attempt in chapter 4 to lay a foundation concerning the main components of a Christian worldview: What does the Bible say about God as Creator, about the earth he created, about us as men and women created in his image, about sin, and about God’s purpose for putting human beings on the earth in the first place? I lay this broad foundation so as to avoid a common mistake of using Bible verses out of context to support nearly any position on current political disputes.

This foundation of a Christian worldview is necessary in order to “see the parts in light of the whole” and thus to understand individual verses correctly from within the overall framework of the Bible’s primary teachings. I put this material at the beginning of the book because basic worldview differences have profound implications for many matters of government policy. In fact, differences over worldview questions explain many of the disagreements between “liberals” and “conservatives” in politics today.

In the rest of the book I examine about sixty specific current issues. I attempt to analyze them from the standpoint of that biblical understanding of civil government and that biblical worldview and also with reference to specific teachings of the Bible that pertain to each issue.

Do I think that everyone who tries to follow the Bible will agree with my understanding of these issues? No. In a book that covers sixty political topics, many readers will agree with me in some sections and disagree with me in others. Many Christian readers who accept the authority of the Bible might argue for alternative positions that they think are better supported from the overall teaching of the Bible. That is fine with me, for I think we grow in our understanding by discussing and reasoning with one another (in a civil manner!). “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety” (Prov. 11:14).

I also want to say that I do not hold with equal confidence every position I support in this book. On some issues I think the overall teaching of the Bible is *clear, direct, and decisive*, such as the idea that civil governments are set up by God to punish evil and

Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (London: SPCK, 1989); Chris Green, ed., *A Higher Throne: Evangelicals and Public Policy* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008); Gordon McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006); Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots*

of Political Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Nick Spencer and Jonathan Chaplin, eds., *God and Government* (London: SPCK, 2009). An older book is Robert Culver, *Toward a Biblical View of Civil Government* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974).

reward good (chap. 3) or the idea that laws in a nation should protect people's lives, particularly the lives of preborn children (chap. 6).

There is a second set of issues where I depend on *arguments from broader principles*. One example is my view that some kind of democracy is a preferable form of government (chap. 3). In this case I have reasoned not from direct, specific biblical teaching on the topic but from broader biblical principles (such as the equality of all people in the image of God and the importance of limitations on the power of human government). That kind of argument from broader principles requires wise judgment in applying those principles correctly to a modern situation, and thus there is a greater possibility of making a mistake or failing to balance the principle with other principles that might modify one's conclusions.

Then I have used a third type of argument: *an appeal to facts in the world*. In some sections (such as chap. 9, on economics), much of my argument depends on one's evaluation of the *actual results* of certain policies (for instance, do lower taxes lead to greater economic growth or not?). Such arguments are different from arguments from *direct biblical statements*, and they are different from arguments from *broader biblical principles*, for they depend not on the Bible but on *an evaluation of the relevant facts* in the world today.

For example, arguments about the environment and the current state of natural resources in the world are in large measure based on appeals to actual facts in the world. To take one specific issue, the argument about global warming is almost entirely an argument about climate facts. It would be impossible to write about political issues today without appealing to a large number of facts in the world.

But a different evaluation of the facts might lead someone to a different conclusion about a certain policy. I am certainly *not* claiming that the Bible also supports all the *facts* I cite about the world today. Readers are free to evaluate and search out evidence about those factual question themselves. What I am doing in each chapter, however, is to say that if my understanding of these facts is correct, then the teachings of the Bible seem to me to lead to one conclusion or another about the specific issue under discussion.

I have not distinguished these three types of argument in the pages that follow. I have not made explicit where I am depending on *direct teachings of the Bible*, where I am depending on *broader biblical principles*, where I am depending on an *evaluation of facts* in the world today, and where I am depending on some combination of these three. But I hope readers will be able to make those distinctions for themselves as they weigh the arguments that I present. And in the end, I hope that most readers will find themselves persuaded by the book.

Part 1

BASIC PRINCIPLES

FIVE WRONG VIEWS ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND GOVERNMENT

Before explaining my own understanding of the proper role of Christians in politics, I need to examine what I think are five wrong views on this question—sadly mistaken views that have been propagated by many writers throughout history. Then in the following chapter I propose what I think is a better, more balanced solution.

A. GOVERNMENT SHOULD COMPEL RELIGION

The first wrong view (according to my judgment) is the idea that civil government should compel people to support or follow one particular religion.

Tragically, this “compel religion” view was held by many Christians in previous centuries. This view played a large role in the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48) that began as a conflict between Protestants and Roman Catholics over control of various territories, especially in Germany. There were many other “wars of religion” in Europe, particularly between Catholics and Protestants, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Also in the sixteenth century, the Reformed and Lutheran Protestants persecuted and killed thousands from the Anabaptist groups in Switzerland and Germany who sought to have churches for “believers only” and practiced baptism by immersion for those who made a personal profession of faith.

Over the course of time, more and more Christians realized that this “compel religion” view is inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus and inconsistent with the nature of faith itself (see discussion below). Today I am not aware of any major Christian group that still holds to the view that government should try to compel people to follow the Christian faith.¹

1. There is a small, fringe movement called Christian Reconstructionism that advocates government enforcement of Old Testament laws today (see discussion, pp. 65–66), but most

or all recognized leaders in the evangelical movement in the United States have clearly distanced themselves from this position regarding civil laws.

But other religions still promote government enforcement of their religion. This is seen in countries such as Saudi Arabia, which enforces laws compelling people to follow Islam and where those who fail to comply can face severe penalties from the religious police. The law prohibits any public practice of any religion other than Islam and prohibits Saudis from converting to other religions. Islamic advocate Bilal Cleland writes at the pro-Islamic web site *Islam for Today*, “Legislation contained in the Quran becomes the basic law of the state.”²

The “compel religion” view is also used by violent groups around the world to justify persecution of Christians, such as the burning by Muslims of an entire Christian village in Pakistan, killing six Christians in early August 2009,³ or the warfare waged by Islamic militant groups against Christians in Nigeria, Sudan, and other sub-Saharan African countries. The “compel religion” view has also led to the violent persecution of Christians by some Hindu groups in India. In 1999 it was reported that fifty-one Christian churches and prayer halls were burned to the ground in the western state of Gujarat. An Australian missionary, Graham Staines, and his two young sons were burned to death in their jeep by a Hindu mob in Orissa state on the eastern coast of India.⁴ In 2007 it was reported by the Associated Press that Hindu extremists set fire to nearly a dozen churches.⁵

But it must be noted that other Muslims and other Hindus also favor democracy and allowing varying degrees of freedom of religion.

In the early years of the United States, support for freedom of religion in the American colonies increased both because of a need to form a united country with people from various religious backgrounds (such as Congregational, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Quaker, Baptist, Roman Catholic, and Jewish) and because many of the colonists had fled from religious persecution in their home countries. For example, the New England Pilgrims had fled from England where they had faced fines and imprisonment for failing to attend services in the Church of England and for conducting their own church services.

In 1779, just three years after the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson drafted the Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, which demonstrated the increasing support for religious freedom in the United States. Jefferson wrote:

Be it therefore enacted by the General Assembly, That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their

2. Bilal Cleland, “Islamic Government,” *Islam for Today*. www.islamfortoday.com/cleland04.htm.

3. Ben Quinn, “Six Christians Burned Alive in Pakistan Riots,” *guardian.co.uk* (Aug. 2, 2009). www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/aug/02/christians-burned-alive-pakistan.

4. Ramola Talwar Badam, “Christians, Hindus Clash in

India,” Associated Press (Oct. 30, 1999). www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/aponline/19991030/aponline111427_000.htm.

5. Gabin Rabinowitz, “Hindus, Christians Clash in India,” Associated Press (Dec. 27, 2007). www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_wires/2007Dec27/0,4675,IndiaChurchesAttacked,00.html.

opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in nowise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.⁶

Several teachings of the Bible show that “government should compel religion” is an incorrect view, one that is contrary to the teachings of the Bible itself.

1. Jesus distinguished the realms of God and of Caesar

The first biblical argument against the “compel religion” view comes from Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 22. Jesus’ Jewish opponents were trying to trap him with the question, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (Matt. 22:18). To say “yes” to Roman taxes ran the risk of appearing to support the hated Roman government. To say “no” to Roman taxes would make Jesus sound like a dangerous revolutionary against Rome’s power. Taking his opponents by surprise, Jesus said, “Show me the coin for the tax,” and “they brought him a denarius” (v. 19). After that, here is how the teaching unfolded:

And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:20–21).

This is a remarkable statement because Jesus shows that there are to be *two different spheres of influence*, one for the government and one for the religious life of the people of God. Some things, such as taxes, belong to the civil government (“the things that are Caesar’s”), and this implies that the church should not try to control these things. On the other hand, some things belong to people’s religious life (“the things that are God’s”), and this implies that the civil government should not try to control those things.

Jesus did not specify any list of things that belong to each category, but the mere distinction of these two categories had monumental significance for the history of the world. It signaled the endorsement of a different system from the laws for the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. With regard to Old Testament Israel, the whole nation was a “theocracy” in that God was the ruler of the people, the laws were directly given to Israel by God (rather than being decided upon by the people or a human king), and *the whole nation* was considered “God’s people.” Therefore everyone in the nation was expected to worship God, and the laws of Israel covered not only what we today would consider “secular matters” such as murder and theft, but also “religious matters” such as animal sacrifices and punishments for worshiping other gods (see Lev. 21–23; Deut. 13:6–11).

In Jesus’ statement about God and Caesar, he established the broad outlines of a new order in which “the things that are God’s” are *not* to be under the control of the civil government (or “Caesar”). Such a system is far different from the Old Testament theocracy that was used for the people of Israel. Jesus’ new teaching implies that all civil governments—even today—should give people freedom regarding the religious faith

6. “The Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom,” drafted by Thomas Jefferson in 1779, passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 1786.

they follow or choose not to follow and regarding the religious doctrines they hold and how they worship God. “Caesar” should not control such things, for they are “the things that are God’s.”

2. Jesus refused to try to compel people to believe in him

Another incident in Jesus’ life also shows how he opposed the “compel religion” view, for he rebuked his disciples when they wanted instant punishment to come to people who rejected him:

And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:52–54).

The disciples apparently thought they had an excellent way to convince people to come to hear Jesus in the next village. If fire came down from heaven and wiped out the Samaritan village that had rejected Jesus, then word would get around and Jesus and the disciples would have 100% attendance in the next village. What a persuasive method to “compel religion”!

But Jesus would have nothing to do with this idea. The next verse says, “But he turned and rebuked them” (Luke 9:55). Jesus directly refused any attempt to try to force people to believe in him or follow him.

3. Genuine faith cannot be forced

The nature of genuine faith fits with Jesus’ condemnation of any request for “fire from heaven” to compel people to follow him. The underlying reason is that *true faith in God must be voluntary*. If faith is to be genuine, it can never be compelled by force. This provides another reason why governments should never try to compel adherence to any particular religion.

A clear respect for people’s individual will and voluntary decisions is seen throughout the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. They always *taught* people and *reasoned* with them and then *appealed* to them to make a personal decision to follow Jesus as the true Messiah (see Matt. 11:28–30; Acts 28:23; Rom. 10:9–10; Rev. 22:17).

Genuine religious belief cannot be compelled by force, whether by fire from heaven or by the force of civil government, and Christians should have no part in any attempt to use government power to *compel* people to support or follow Christianity or any other religion.

But what about the laws God gave to Israel in the Old Testament, especially in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy? Those laws required people to give tithing money to support the Jewish priesthood and temple services, and they required people to make certain specified sacrifices to the Lord every year (see Lev. 23).

They even ordered severe punishments for anyone who tried to teach another religion (see Deut. 13:6–11). But these laws *were only for the nation of Israel for that particular time*. They were never imposed on any of the surrounding nations. They were part of the Old Testament system that came to an end when Jesus established a “new covenant” for God’s people in the New Testament. Such a system was ended by Jesus’ teaching that some areas of life were “things that belong to Caesar” and some areas of life were “things that belong to God.” Such Old Testament laws enforcing religion were never intended for people after Jesus established his “new covenant,” or for any time after that.

4. Not a worldly kingdom

In another incident, just after Jesus had been captured by Roman soldiers near the end of his life, he told the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate,

“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world” (John 18:36).

Jesus refused to have his disciples fight with swords and military power, because *he was not attempting to establish an earthly kingdom like the Roman Empire* or the various other nations in the history of the world. Earthly kingdoms are established by armies and military power, but Jesus’ kingdom would be established by the power of the Gospel changing people’s hearts, bringing people to trust in him and obey him.

This does not mean that Jesus’ kingdom has no effect on the world. Indeed, it transforms and overcomes the world (1 John 3:8; 5:4–5), but it does so by changing people’s hearts and their deep convictions, not by military power. The power of government should never be used to compel a certain kind of religious belief or adherence to any specific religion, whether the Christian faith or any other faith.

In summary, the “compel religion” view is contrary to the Bible, and it is simply wrong.

5. Practical implications of rejecting the “compel religion” view

What are the practical implications of rejecting the “compel religion” view? One implication is that governments should never attempt to force people to follow or believe in one specific religion, but should guarantee freedom of religion for followers of all religions within the nation.

Another implication is that Christians in every nation should support freedom of religion and oppose any attempt by government to compel any single religion. In fact, *complete freedom of religion* should be the first principle advocated and defended by Christians who seek to influence government.

Sometimes non-Christians express a fear that if Christians get too much power in government, they will try to force Christianity on everyone. This is a common argument made by groups such as Americans United for Separation of Church and State,

the Center for American Progress, and the Freedom from Religion Foundation. Some critics even suggest that right-wing Christians are trying to establish a theocracy in the United States by incremental means. Michelle Goldberg writes, “The Christian nation is both the goal of the religious right and its fundamental ideology, the justification for its attempt to overthrow the doctrine of separation of church and state. . . . Right now . . . is high tide for theocratic fervor.”⁷ To counter this kind of false accusation, it is important for Christians involved in politics to affirm again and again their commitment to complete religious freedom in America (and in every other country).

A third implication has to do with governments giving direct financial support to one church as an established “state church.” Such government support is a more benign form of the “compel religion” view, but it is still one that I do not think is right. This support occurs in some countries where the civil government uses tax money and privileged status to support one single religion or denomination as the “state church.” Such action was prohibited to the US government by the First Amendment—“Government shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion”—where an “establishment of religion” meant giving governmental support for only one church, the “established church.”

An established church does still exist in some countries. For example, in the United Kingdom today the Church of England is still the state church;⁸ in Scandinavian countries such as Norway and Sweden the Lutheran Church is the state church;⁹ and in many countries with a highly Catholic populace such as Spain, the Roman Catholic Church is the state-supported church. In Germany, church taxes are assessed on Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish wage-earners, up to 8 or 9% of their total income. The state then disperses these funds to the churches to be used for social services.¹⁰

I recognize that some Christians in these countries argue that the benefits that come from having such a state church outweigh the negative effects, but I still cannot see sufficient warrant for it in the New Testament. I see no evidence that government tax money, rather than the donations of individual Christians, should be used to support the religious activities of a church. In addition, the historical pattern seems to be that direct government support weakens a church rather than strengthening it. (Notice the extremely low church attendance at state-sponsored Lutheran churches in Germany or Sweden, for example.)

6. What about giving some tax benefits to churches?

If the government gives some tax benefits to religious organizations, is that another example of the “compel religion” view? For example, in the United States, churches do not pay property taxes on the land and buildings they own, and individuals do not have to pay income taxes on the amount of their income that they donate to churches or other charities.

7. Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: Norton, 2007), 27–28. See also Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy* (New York: Viking Adult, 2006).

8. John L. Allen Jr., “In Europe, ‘Church Taxes’ Are Not

Unusual,” *National Catholic Reporter* (Jan. 29, 2009). www.natcath.com/NCR_Online/archives/012999/012999f.htm.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

I do not object to these policies because I do not think they are *compelling* religion in any meaningful sense. No specific denomination or religion is given preferential treatment. Baptist churches receive these benefits, but so do Buddhist temples, Jewish synagogues, Roman Catholic churches, and Muslim mosques. The reason for this preferential tax treatment for churches and other charities is that the society has decided that, in general, charitable organizations such as churches do much good for the society as a whole. In the classic wording of the preface to the US Constitution, they “promote the general welfare.” Therefore it is entirely reasonable for a society to decide to give churches some tax benefits that are open to all religions equally. This is not compelling support of any one religion; it is not giving any government funds directly to any religious group; and it is certainly not contrary to the original meaning and intention of the First Amendment. Giving such tax benefits is not compelling religion.

7. The spiritual influence behind the “compel religion” view

There is an invisible spiritual power with a hidden goal behind this “compel religion” viewpoint, and it can be seen in its results. By compelling religious belief, this viewpoint tends to destroy true Christian faith in two ways. If it compels people *to follow a non-Christian religion* (such as Hinduism in India or Islam in many other nations), then it often leads to violently suppressing Christians and aims at driving Christianity out of a nation. On the other hand, if it attempts to compel people *to become Christians*, then it also tends to drive out true Christianity because the opportunity to choose freely to become a Christian is removed from people’s lives. A few people will have genuine faith, but most will not. The result is that the entire society will be “Christian,” but in name only. In addition, such a church will then be governed by “Christians” who are not really Christians at all because they do not have genuine faith. And a church governed primarily by non-Christians will quickly become a spiritually dead and ineffective church.

Therefore it should not be difficult for Christians, who believe the teachings of the Bible, to discern the real spiritual influence behind the “compel religion” view. It is an influence that is completely opposed to the teachings of the Bible and to genuine Christian faith. It is an influence that seeks to destroy true Christianity.

B. GOVERNMENT SHOULD EXCLUDE RELIGION

The opposite error from the “compel religion” view is the view that says we should completely exclude religion from government and politics. According to this view, religious beliefs should never be mentioned in governmental functions or on government property and should never play a role in the decision-making process in politics or government.

This second view is the one effectively promoted by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and much of the rest of secular society today. According to this view, religious belief should be kept at home and kept quiet. There should be no influence from religious groups in the political process.

Examples of this view are seen when people object to prayers being given at the beginning of a city council meeting or at a legislative session.¹¹ Other examples are seen when groups demand that the Ten Commandments be removed from any public places or crosses be removed from government seals and veterans' memorials,¹² or demand that student Bible studies, prayers before a sports event,¹³ a prayer at a graduation ceremony,¹⁴ or a valedictorian talking about his or her faith at graduation¹⁵ should be prohibited from public high schools.

For example, after ACLU threats, the cross was removed from the Los Angeles County seal¹⁶ and a high school valedictorian in Las Vegas, Nevada, was told she had to remove all references to Christ from her speech. She chose to keep them in and had the sound cut off by the school principal in the middle of her address.¹⁷

The “exclude religion from government” view was seen when a judge threw out the death sentence in a murder trial in Colorado because it was discovered that some of the jurors had quoted Bible verses during the jury's deliberations. This was considered juror misconduct.¹⁸

The most troubling example of this view was seen in the 1996 Supreme Court decision *Romer v. Evans*. The case concerned a constitutional amendment that had been passed by the citizens of Colorado. The amendment prohibited giving special legal rights to homosexuals, and the result of the amendment would be that homosexuals would be treated the same as everyone else in society, not given special rights and protections simple because they were homosexuals. The Supreme Court struck down this amendment because the majority of the court held that the amendment “lacks a rational relationship to legitimate state interests” and that the citizens of Colorado had shown “animosity towards homosexuals” when they voted for the amendment.¹⁹

This “exclude religion” view has had a strong influence in recent campaigns to persuade the courts to legalize same-sex “marriage.” When the Iowa Supreme Court decided to impose same-sex “marriage” on the state of Iowa (in the case *Varnum v. Brien*, April 3, 2009), it noted that only 28.1% of Iowans supported it.²⁰ The court then observed that “much of society rejects same-sex marriage due to sincere, deeply ingrained—even

11. See *ACLU of Kentucky v. Mercer County, Kentucky*, U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit, No. 03–5142. Argued: April 27, 2004. Decided and Filed: Dec. 20, 2005; and numerous other cases.

12. John Antczak, “ACLU Demands Removal of Cross from Los Angeles County Seal,” Associated Press (May 25, 2004); Peter J. Smith, “City of ‘Las Cruces’ Sued to Remove 3 Crosses from Emblem,” *LifeSite.com* (Aug. 8, 2006), and David Asman, “Battle to Tear Down a Tribute,” *Fox News* (June 2, 2005).

13. Adam Nossiter, “ACLU Asks Jail for Tangipahoa School Officials,” Associated Press (May 18, 2005), and “High School’s Pre-Game Prayer Called ‘Un-American and Immoral,’” *WKYC.com* (April 6, 2005).

14. “West VA School District Ends Graduation Prayer Policy; Student’s Lawsuit ‘Educated’ Officials,” *ACLU Press Release* (Aug. 14, 2002).

15. Nisha N. Mohammed, “Victory: Federal Court Again Rules That High School Valedictorian Silenced for Referencing Christ

Should Have Day in Court” (June 22, 2007). www.rutherford.org/articles_db/press_release.asp?article_id=671; and Nathan Burchfiel, “Valedictorian Silenced over Her Christian Faith Will Go to Court,” *CNSNews.com* (Dec. 19, 2006).

16. Antczak, “ACLU Demands Removal of Cross from Los Angeles County Seal.”

17. Burchfiel, “Valedictorian Silenced over Her Christian Faith Will Go to Court.”

18. The 2005 death sentence of Robert Harlan was eventually changed to life in prison as a result of a decision by the Colorado Supreme Court. See “Colorado’s Death Row,” *Coloradans Against the Death Penalty*. www.coadp.org/thedeathrow/RobertHarlan.html.

19. *Romer v. Evans*, No. 94–1039, Decided by the United States Supreme Court, May 20, 1996. www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/94–1039.ZO.html.

20. *Varnum v. Brien*, 763 N.W.2d 862 (Iowa Supreme Court, 2009), 64, n. 29.

fundamental—religious belief.” But such views should not be taken into account, said the court, because the Iowa constitution says, “The general assembly shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.”²¹ In other words, limiting marriage to one man and one woman would be equivalent to “establishing” a religion.

The same kind of argument was made in California. David Boies, a prominent lawyer challenging Proposition 8 (a California constitutional amendment that limits marriage to one man and one woman), argued that, while people may have “genuine religious beliefs” that marriage should be between a man and a woman, still “the other half of the First Amendment, the Establishment Clause ... says that a majority is not entitled to impose its religious beliefs on a minority.”²² In other words, even though 52% of Californians voted to define marriage as between one man and one woman, they were wrongly “establishing” a religion.

There are several reasons why the “exclude religion from government” view is wrong.

1. It fails to distinguish the reasons for a law from the content of the law

Such “exclude religion” arguments are wrong because marriage is not a religion! When voters define marriage, they are not establishing a *religion*. In the First Amendment, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” the word “religion” refers to the church that people attend and support. “Religion” means being a Baptist or Catholic or Presbyterian or Jew. It does not mean being married. These arguments try to make the word “religion” in the Constitution mean something different from what it has always meant.

These arguments also make the logical mistake of failing to distinguish the *reasons* for a law from the *content* of the law. There were *religious reasons* behind many of our laws, but these laws do not “establish” a religion. All major religions have teachings against stealing, but laws against stealing do not “establish a religion.” All religions have laws against murder, but laws against murder do not “establish a religion.” The campaign to abolish slavery in the United States and England was led by many Christians, based on their religious convictions, but laws abolishing slavery do not “establish a religion.” The campaign to end racial discrimination and segregation was led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a Baptist pastor, who preached against racial injustice from the Bible. But laws against discrimination and segregation do not “establish a religion.”

If these “exclude religion” arguments succeed in court, they could soon be applied against evangelicals and Catholics who make “religious” arguments against abortion. Majority votes to protect unborn children could then be invalidated by saying these voters are “establishing a religion.” And, by such reasoning, *all the votes of religious citizens* for almost *any* issue could be found invalid by court decree! This would be the direct opposite of the kind of country the Founding Fathers established, and the direct opposite of what they meant by “free exercise” of religion in the First Amendment.

21. *Ibid.*, 64–65.

22. “Prop. 8 Defenders Say Plaintiffs Attacked ‘Orthodox Religious Beliefs,’” *Wall Street Journal* (online blog, Feb. 10, 2010).

<http://blogs.wsj.com/law/2010/02/10/prop-8-defenders-accuse-plaintiffs-of-attacking-orthodox-religious-beliefs/tab/print/>.

2. It overrides the will of the people

In Colorado, supporters of the constitutional amendment mentioned above included many thousands of Christians whose views on homosexual conduct were influenced by the teachings of the Bible and traditional Judeo-Christian moral values. But such a religious viewpoint, said the court, could not be said to have “a rational relationship to legitimate state interests.”²³ In other words, religious or moral reasons that were sincerely held by the citizens of Colorado were not “rational” reasons. Their votes did not count because they used religious reasons to decide their vote. So their 52% vote was overturned by the Supreme Court.²⁴ This kind of decision is the natural outcome of the “exclude religion from government” view, and it simply overrides the will of the people in amending their state’s constitution (as was the case also in Iowa and California, mentioned above).

3. It changes freedom of religion into freedom from religion

From the perspective of American history, another reason that “exclude religion” is a wrong viewpoint is that it twists the positive ideal of “freedom of religion” to mean “freedom *from* all religious influence”—which is something entirely different and something the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the framers of the US Constitution never intended.

In fact, the “exclude religion from politics” view would invalidate the very reasoning of the Declaration of Independence, on which the United States of America was first founded. The first two sentences mention God twice in order to say that God’s laws authorize this independence from Great Britain in 1776 and that God is the one who gives human beings the rights that governments seek to protect:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature *and of Nature’s God* entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are *endowed by their Creator* with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men. . . .

In other words, the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence proclaimed that both the laws of nature *and God himself* gave our country the right to become an independent nation. They are claiming *divine authorization* for the very existence of the United States of America!

23. *Varnum v. Brien*.

24. *Ibid.*

Then the signers say that the entire purpose of government is to protect the rights that are given to people by God. The second sentence states “that all Men are created equal” and “are *endowed by their Creator* with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Then the signers add that “Governments are instituted among Men” in order to protect or “secure” these rights. In other words, these most basic of human rights are given *by God* (“endowed by their Creator”), and the purpose of government is to protect those God-given rights, according to the Declaration of Independence upon which the country was founded. The “exclude religion from government” view is wrong when it implies the illegitimacy of statements like these found in the very basis of our existence as a nation. Using religious *reasons* to support a secular law is not *establishing a religion*.

The First Amendment to the Constitution then declared: “Congress shall make no law *respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof*; or abridging the freedom of speech.” What they meant by “an establishment of religion” was an established state church, a government-sponsored or government-endorsed denomination or specific religion. The First Amendment therefore prohibited the United States from having a state church such as the Church of England, from which many of the original colonists had fled in order to gain their religious freedom.

In fact, the now-famous “separation of church and state” letter that Thomas Jefferson wrote back in 1802 to the Danbury Baptists of Connecticut dealt with this issue. The Danbury Baptists had written to the new President expressing their concern over their home state of Connecticut designating the Congregational Church as the official state church. In his response, Jefferson pointed out that the meaning of the First Amendment was to keep government out of the affairs of the church, not to keep the church out of the affairs of government. Jefferson argued that when government left the church alone and did not compel its citizens to be members of an official state church, religious freedom could flourish.²⁵

The First Amendment was never intended to guarantee that government should be free from religion or religious influence. The only “freedom of religion” that was intended was freedom from government sponsorship of one particular religion or denomination.

4. It wrongly restricts freedom of religion and freedom of speech

The First Amendment also excluded any law “prohibiting the free exercise” of religion. Therefore the First Amendment is directly opposed to the “exclude religion from government” view, which actually seeks to *prohibit* Christians and Jews and many from other religious backgrounds from exercising their religious freedom when arguing for an amendment to the Colorado constitution, or when arguing for a certain jury verdict,

25. Thomas Jefferson, letter to Danbury Baptists (Jan. 1, 1802), www.loc.gov/loc/lcjh/9806/danpre.html; see also Daniel Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Myth of Separation* (New York:

New York University Press, 2002), 29; Joseph LoConte, “The Wall Jefferson Almost Built” (Dec. 27, 2001), www.heritage.org/Press/Commentary.ed122701c.cfm.

or when speaking or giving a prayer at a public event. Their free exercise of religion is taken away from them.

This view also wrongly restricts individual freedom of speech. Why should a high school valedictorian not be free to express her own viewpoint in her graduation speech? Why should Christian citizens not be free to campaign for or against a certain polity based on their moral convictions—convictions that are derived from their religious faith? *Speaking* a religious opinion in public is not *compelling* people to accept that viewpoint!

The nature of a free society requires that people should be able to base their political convictions on whatever reasoning process and whatever authority they prefer, and they should be free to attempt to persuade others that their reasoning is correct. We should protect people's freedom to base their moral and political convictions on the dialogues of Plato if they want, or the teachings of Confucius or the Bible or the Jewish Talmud—or, I suppose, even a song by Bob Dylan if that is what they find persuasive. And if other voters choose to accept the reasoning put forth by the followers of Plato or Confucius or the Bible (or Bob Dylan!), then the Supreme Court should not take it upon itself to say that the reasons that voters used are not “rational” reasons. It is not up to the Supreme Court to decide that some people's votes are legitimate and some people's votes are illegitimate.

5. It was never adopted by the American people

The “exclude religion” view was never adopted by the American people through any democratic process, but it is being imposed on our nation by the exercise of “raw judicial power” by our courts, and especially by the Supreme Court. This has been an increasing problem for the last several decades in America.

The Supreme Court decision *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971) was especially significant. In that case the court said that government actions “must not have the primary effect of advancing or inhibiting religion.”²⁶ It did not say “advancing or inhibiting *one particular religion*” but “religion” in general.

In fact, the court's tendency to exclude government actions that brought benefit to *religions generally* had first found expression in the 1947 decision *Everson v. Board of Education*, in which the majority opinion opposed aid to “all religions.”

The “establishment of religion” clause of the First Amendment means at least this: Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, *aid all religions*, or prefer one religion over another. . . . *The First Amendment has erected a wall between church and state*. That wall must be kept high and impregnable. We could not approve the slightest breach. New Jersey has not breached it here.²⁷

26. *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971). Majority opinion written by Chief Justice Warren Earl Burger.

27. *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947), italics added.

Although subsequent decisions have not applied the *Lemon* guideline stringently, when it is understood broadly it results in excluding *all* religious expression from the public square. It is an extreme example of the “exclude religion” view, never adopted or approved by the American people but simply decreed by our Supreme Court, taking to itself powers it never legitimately had.

6. It removes from government God’s teaching about good and evil

The Bible says that a government official is “God’s servant for your good” (Rom. 13:4), but how can government officials effectively serve God if no one is allowed to tell them what they believe God expects of them? The Bible says that government officials are sent “to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Peter 2:14), but how can they do that if no spokesmen from any of the world’s religions are allowed to give them counsel on what is “good” and what is “evil”?

Such a viewpoint has to assume that there is no God, or if there is, we cannot know his moral standards.

7. Biblical examples of God’s people giving counsel to rulers

The Bible gives several examples of faithful believers who gave clear witness to government officials about how they should govern. The prophet Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the most powerful ruler in the world in about 600 BC:

“O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity” (Dan. 4:27).

In the New Testament, John the Baptist rebuked Herod the Tetrarch (a civil governor under the Roman Empire) “for Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done” (Luke 3:19). Certainly John’s rebuke of “all the evil things” included many acts that Herod had done as a governmental ruler.

Later, the apostle Paul reasoned with the Roman governor Felix “about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” (Acts 24:25). It is likely that Paul was calling Felix to account for his conduct as a government official under the Roman Empire, and “Felix was alarmed” and sent Paul away (v. 25). In addition, many Old Testament prophets spoke to foreign nations about their sins. One can read these prophetic rebukes in Isaiah 13–23; Jeremiah 46–51; Ezekiel 25–32; Amos 1–2; Obadiah (to Edom); Jonah (to Nineveh); Nahum (to Nineveh); Habakkuk 2; and Zephaniah 2.

Therefore the Bible does not support the “exclude religion from government” view.

8. The spiritual basis for the “exclude religion” view

It should not be hard for Christians to discern a deep spiritual basis underlying the “exclude religion” view. This is because the final goal of the “exclude religion” view is to make government completely secular and then, by extension, to make society completely

secular. This view would remove from government any sense of accountability to God for its actions. And since government has such a huge influence on all people's lives, it would tend to remove from the nation in general any sense of accountability to God, especially as all religious viewpoints are removed from the entire system of public education of children.

Moreover, since all *absolute* moral standards are in some way based on religious convictions and a sense of moral accountability to God, this view would *tend to remove from the entire nation any sense of absolute moral standards* or any sense that there is any clear way of knowing right from wrong. Therefore the ultimate goal of this viewpoint is not only the destruction of all *belief in God*, but also the *complete moral disintegration* of a society. For Christians who believe the Bible, it should not be hard to discern the ultimate spiritual force behind this viewpoint.

C. ALL GOVERNMENT IS EVIL AND DEMONIC

According to this third view, all use of government power is deeply infected by evil, demonic forces. The realm of government power is the realm of Satan and his forces, and therefore all governmental use of “power over” someone is “worldly” and is not the way of life that Jesus taught.

Those who hold this view also usually favor military pacifism. They argue that since Jesus told us to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39), the best way to resolve disputes—even among nations—is *never* to use military force, but *always* to negotiate and build friendships and act in a Christlike way, showing love to other nations.

1. Support from Luke 4:6

This viewpoint has been strongly promoted by Minnesota pastor Greg Boyd in his influential book *The Myth of a Christian Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). Boyd's views in this book have had a large impact in the United States, especially on younger evangelical voters.²⁸

Boyd says that all civil government is “demonic” (p. 21). Boyd's primary evidence is Satan's statement to Jesus in Luke 4:

And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, *for it has been delivered to me*, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours” (Luke 4:5–7).

Boyd emphasizes Satan's claim that all the authority of all the kingdoms of the world “has been delivered to me” and then says that Jesus “doesn't dispute the Devil's claim

28. For example, echoes of Boyd's writing can be seen at various places in Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

to own them. Apparently, the authority of all the kingdoms of the world has been given to Satan.”²⁹

Boyd goes on to say, “Functionally, Satan is the acting CEO of all earthly governments.”³⁰ This is indeed a thoroughgoing claim!

2. The mistake of depending on Luke 4:6

Greg Boyd is clearly wrong at this point. Jesus tells us how to evaluate Satan’s claims, for he says that Satan “has nothing to do with the truth” because

“there is *no truth in him*. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Jesus didn’t need to respond to *every* false word Satan said, for his purpose was to resist the temptation itself, and this he did with the decisive words, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve’” (Luke 4:8).

In evaluating Boyd’s claim that “the authority of all the kingdoms of the world has been given to Satan,” we have a choice: Do we believe *Satan’s words* that he has the authority of all earthly kingdoms, or do we believe *Jesus’ words* that Satan is a liar and the father of lies? The answer is easy: Satan wanted Jesus to believe a lie, and he wants us to believe that same lie, that he is the ruler of earthly governments.³¹

By contrast, there are some very specific verses in the Bible that tell us how we should think of civil governments. These verses do not agree with Satan’s claim in Luke 4:6 or with Boyd’s claim about Satan’s authority over all earthly governments. Rather, these verses where *God* (not Satan) is speaking portray civil government as a gift from God, something that is subject to God’s rule (not Satan) and used by God for his purposes. Here are some of those passages:

“*The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men*” (Dan. 4:17).

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For *there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God*. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for *he is God’s servant for your good*. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For *he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer*. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the *authorities are the ministers of God, attending to this very thing* (Rom. 13:1–6).

29. Greg Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 21.

30. *Ibid.*, 22.

31. Boyd also quotes some other verses in *Myth of a Christian Nation*, 21–22, but none of them refer specifically to civil governments, so they do not prove his point.

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good (1 Peter 2:13–14).

At this point it is interesting that both Paul (in Romans) and Peter see civil government as doing the *opposite* of what Satan does: civil governments are established by God “to *punish* those who do evil,” but Satan *encourages* those who do evil! Civil governments are established by God “to *praise* those who do good,” but Satan *discourages and attacks* those who do good. In addition, it would not make sense for Peter to say, “Be subject for the Lord's sake to every institution in which Satan is the CEO.” Peter would not want Christian citizens to be subject to Satan's control and direction.

The point is that Satan wants us to believe that all civil government is under his control, but that is not taught anywhere in the Bible. (Of course, Satan can *influence* some individuals in government, but he is not in control.) The only verse in the whole Bible that says Satan has authority over all governments is spoken by the father of lies, and we should not believe it. Greg Boyd is simply wrong in his defense of the view that “all government is demonic.”

3. But where did Jesus ever teach us to use force?

In supporting his position, Boyd often appeals to the teachings of Jesus rather than the teachings of the whole Bible. For example, “Jesus didn't come to give us the Christian answer to the world's many socio-political quandaries”³² Boyd also says that the “just war” theory is “something that Christ never taught or hinted at”³³ (quoting George Zabelka with approval).

But this form of argument fails to recognize that the *whole Bible* was given to us by God. We have no right to restrict our views to the teachings of Jesus in the four Gospels. If the main teaching on civil government in the Bible is found in Genesis 9:5–6, and in the historical narratives and laws in Exodus to Deuteronomy and Judges to 2 Chronicles, and in Romans 13, and in 1 Peter 2:13–14, then getting Christians to neglect those passages gets them to misunderstand what the Bible says about civil government. That is exactly what Boyd is doing when he asks, “Where did Jesus ever act or talk like this?”³⁴ The answer is that *the whole Bible* comes with the authority of God and the authority of Jesus Christ, and our position on government should be based on the teaching of the whole Bible. (Also, Jesus did seem to authorize the use of a sword for self-defense and protection against robbers in Luke 22:36–38; see discussion below on pp. 201–3.)

4. Support from Homer's Iliad and Odyssey

One other argument used by Boyd depends on the Greek writer Homer in his epic poems *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Boyd says that

32. *Ibid.*, 59.

33. *Ibid.*, 168.

34. *Ibid.*, 91.

in Homer “the gods” are always involved in the affairs of humans. . . . For Homer, the inevitability of war is not just the result of conflicting passions—it has a supernatural dimension. And all the while, Zeus sits on Mount Olympus, amused by the sport of it all.³⁵

Boyd says that if we understand these Greek “gods” to be demonic forces, then

Homer was also right about the gods. . . . Our tribal, territorial, and ideological passions have a demonic dimension to them. . . . From a scriptural perspective, these fallen gods are behind and involved in the conflict that occurs between nations. And all the while, Satan, the ultimate single “power over” god of this age, watches the bloodshed with a demonic sense of amusement.³⁶

5. This view leads to a “moral equivalence” between good and evil governments

There are two problems with Boyd’s analysis here: (1) Homer is not the Bible, nor did he write (in the eighth century BC) from a biblical worldview, and we should be suspicious of any worldview that is derived from ancient Greek mythology rather than from the Bible. (2) In Homer (as interpreted by Boyd) the motivating factors of the governments on the two different sides in a war *are both demonic*.

This leads Boyd to adopt a “moral equivalence” view of various conflicts between nations: both sides are following Satan. (Although Boyd does not explicitly say it, this view would imply that Adolf Hitler was following Satan, for example, and England and the United States were also following Satan in sending armies to defeat Hitler!) Boyd does apply his “moral equivalence” view to the modern conflict between American forces and terrorists in Iraq, and specifically the terrorists’ beheading of an American civilian, Nicholas Berg. Boyd says this to his American readers:

Your yearning for justice is, of course, natural. But this rage is exactly what led the terrorists to cut off Mr. Berg’s head in the first place. You probably passionately believe that our cause is just, and theirs is evil, but the terrorists passionately believe that their cause is just and ours is evil. Your passion for American justice is mirrored by their passion for Islamic justice.³⁷

How could Boyd come to the point where he sees Islamic beheading of innocent civilians as *morally equivalent* to America defending itself against terrorist attacks? How could he believe that a nation that *never* intentionally targets innocent civilians is *morally the same* as a terrorist movement that *makes it a conscious policy* to target, torture, and kill innocent civilians?

Boyd reaches this conclusion because he follows this wrongful “all government is demonic” view. Boyd sees *committing* horrible terrorist acts and *defending* against

35. Ibid., 23.

36. Ibid., 24.

37. Ibid., 25.

terrorists as morally equivalent because he believes Satan's lie in Luke 4:6 that all the authority in the earth's kingdoms has been given to him, and he believes Homer's false Greek mythology that the "gods" (which Boyd sees as demons) motivate *both sides* in human conflicts. Boyd believes these errors from Satan and Homer rather than fully believing the Bible when it says that the civil government "is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:4).

Thus Boyd's "all government is demonic" view makes him unable to see the truth, namely, that terrorists who attack innocent civilians (as at 9/11) are evil, and the American military, when it pursues and kills terrorists who are attacking innocent civilians, is working as "God's servant for your good" and "is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:4). Boyd simply fails to realize that carrying out terrorist murders of innocent civilians is evil and defending a nation against such terrorists is good. But his position is the logical consequence of the "all government is demonic" view.

6. Boyd's rejection of all governmental "power over" as "worldly"

There is yet a deeper reason behind Boyd's "all government is demonic" view. The deeper reason is that Boyd rejects what he calls governmental "power over" others as worldly and not part of the kingdom of God. Boyd says,

Wherever a person or group exercises *power over* others ... there is a version of the kingdom of the world. While it comes in many forms, the kingdom of the world is in essence a "power over" kingdom.... There have been democratic, socialist, communist, fascist, and totalitarian versions of the kingdom of the world, but they all share this distinctive characteristic: they exercise "power over" people.³⁸

Boyd explains that this *power over* people is sometimes called "the power of the sword." He says, "The power of the sword is the ability to coerce behavior by threats and to make good on those threats when necessary: if a law is broken, you will be punished."³⁹ While Boyd admits that this exercise of "power over" others is "not altogether bad,"⁴⁰ because Romans 13 explains that God uses this power of government "to keep law and order in the world,"⁴¹ he immediately returns to his main emphasis on Satan's authority over all the kingdoms of the world⁴² and concludes that "even the best political ideology lies under the influence of a 'power over' cosmic ruler who is working at cross-purposes to God."⁴³

By contrast, Boyd thinks people should recognize the contrast "between the 'power over' kingdom of the world and the 'power under' kingdom of God," which is the same as "Lion power" versus "Lamb power."⁴⁴ He says, "The kingdom God advances by people lovingly placing themselves *under* others, in service to others, at cost to themselves."⁴⁵

38. Ibid., 18, italics added.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., 19.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 21.

43. Ibid., 22.

44. Ibid., 31.

45. Ibid.

Boyd says that “coming under others has a power to do what laws and bullets and bombs can never do—namely, bring about transformation in an enemy’s heart.”⁴⁶ He then says,

Obviously, when hearts and motives are transformed, behavior is eventually transformed as well—but without “power over” threats. Similarly, where the rule of God is established, law and order are established—but without “power over” force.... Do you trust “power over” or “power under”? Do you trust the power of the sword, the power of external force, or do you trust the influential but non-coercive power of Calvary-like love?⁴⁷

7. Boyd says Christians should not even fight to defend their wives and children or their country

This rejection of governmental “power over” other people leads Boyd to say that a person totally conformed to the image of Jesus Christ should not even use physical violence to defend against an attacker who “threatened to kill you, your wife, or your children.”⁴⁸ Plus, the rejection of the “power over” kingdom also leads him to say that Christians should never serve in combat situations in the military:

I find it impossible to reconcile Jesus’ teaching (and the teaching of the whole New Testament) concerning our call to love our enemies and never return evil with evil with the choice to serve (or not resist being drafted) in the armed forces in a capacity that might require killing someone.⁴⁹

He also says, “I honestly see no way to condone a Christian’s decision to kill on behalf of any country—or for any other reason.”⁵⁰

So at the heart of Boyd’s teaching is a *fundamental opposition to the use of superior force to restrain evil*, even an evil criminal who attacks one’s wife and children. Boyd’s “all government is demonic” view leads him to advocate an absolute, total pacifism for those who wish to follow Christ.

8. God has established both evangelism and the power of government to restrain evil

The problem with Boyd’s view here is that he fails to distinguish the task of *evangelism* from the task of *civil government*. Of course God has not told us to spread the Gospel of Christ by using the “power of the sword” or the power of government. We spread the Gospel by the proclamation of the Word of God (see Rom. 10:17). But God *has* told us that we should restrain evil by the power of the sword and by the power of civil government (as in the teaching of Romans 13:1–6, quoted above, p. 37).

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., 32–33.

48. Ibid., 162, 166.

49. Ibid., 166–67.

50. Ibid., 173.

If the power of government (such as a policeman) is not present in an emergency, when great harm is being done to another person, then my love for the victim should lead me to use physical force to prevent any further harm from occurring. If I found a criminal attacking my wife or children, I would use all my physical strength and all the physical force at my disposal against him, not to persuade him to trust in Christ as his Savior, but to immediately stop him from harming my wife and children! I would follow the command of Nehemiah, who told the men of Israel, “Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes” (Neh. 4:14; see also Genesis 14:14–16, where Abraham rescued his kinsman Lot who had been taken captive by a raiding army).

Boyd has wrongly taken *one* of the ways that God restrains evil in this world (changing hearts through the Gospel of Christ) and decided that it is the *only* way that God restrains evil (thus neglecting the valuable role of civil government). Both means are from God, both are good, and both should be used by Christians.

This is why Boyd misunderstands Jesus’ statement, “If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matt. 5:39). When this verse is rightly understood (see below, p. 82), we see that Jesus is telling individuals not to take revenge for a personal insult or a humiliating slap on the cheek.⁵¹ But this command for individual kindness is not the same as the instructions that the Bible gives to governments, who are to “bear the sword” and be a “terror” to bad conduct and are to carry out “God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rom. 13:3–4). The verses must be understood rightly in their own contexts. One is talking about individual conduct and personal revenge. The other is talking about the responsibilities of government. We should not confuse the two passages.

9. Could more pacifism have stopped slavery or stopped Hitler?

Near the end of his book Boyd responds to the objection that war was necessary to end slavery in the United States (in the Civil War) and to stop Hitler’s campaign to take over the entire world (in World War II). Didn’t the use of military force bring about good in those cases?

Boyd’s response is to say that if Christians had been better pacifists, history would have been different: “Had professing Christians been remotely like Jesus in the first place, there would have been no slavery or war for us to wonder about what *would have happened* had Christians loved their enemies and turned the other cheek.”⁵² With regard to the US Civil War, Boyd says, “A kingdom person should rather wonder what might have happened had more kingdom people been willing to live out the call of the radical kingdom.”⁵³

But this is just an elegant way of saying, “If history was different, it would prove my case.” And that is another way of saying, “If the facts were different, they would prove my case.” That is not a valid argument. It is appealing to wishful thinking rather than facts.

51. See explanation of this verse in *ESV Study Bible*, p. 1830; see also pp. 2554–55.

52. Boyd, *Myth of a Christian Nation*, 174.

53. *Ibid.*, 177.

Boyd is simply saying that if the world were different, the world would be different. But that proves nothing. History is what it is, and history shows that both the evil of American slavery and the evil of Adolf Hitler were only stopped by the power of superior military force. That is the task that God has assigned to governments when they “bear the sword” (Rom. 13:4).

10. The more ominous implications of the “all government is demonic” view

I am concerned about the influence of Boyd’s position because his mistake is not simply a harmless failure to distinguish the task of evangelism from the task of government. There is a much more serious problem with his position, namely, that it tends to persuade Christians *to oppose all governmental power over evil*. Although we cannot discuss the biblical passages in detail until later chapters, at many places in the Bible God approves the use of governmental power over evildoers: see, for example, Genesis 9:5–6; the narratives concerning Moses and other righteous judges and kings in the Old Testament; Romans 13:1–6; and 1 Peter 2:13–14. God establishes civil government and authorizes it to use its power to restrain evil, “to *punish* those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Peter 2:14).

But what would happen if more and more Christians agreed with Greg Boyd that the use of “power over” evildoers by government is serving Satan as “CEO” and Christians should have no part in it?

On the world scene, it would mean less and less support for a strong military and more and more insistence on endless conversations with aggressive nations who would attack us and our allies. It would mean more and more of the kind of appeasement that led Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of England to sign the Munich Agreement of 1938, giving Hitler a large section of Czechoslovakia with no objection from Britain, only in exchange for Hitler’s (empty) promise of peace. This view would today result in increasing objection to the use of military power to oppose evil aggressors anywhere in the world. And that, in turn, would result in increased aggression by Islamic terrorists as well as by countries such as Russia, North Korea, Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, and any others who realize that no act of aggression would be answered by American military force anywhere in the world.

At the local level, this rejection of all governmental “power over” evil would mean more and more opposition to the use of superior force by local police, for Boyd’s ideal way of opposing all evildoers is “by people lovingly placing themselves *under* others, in service to others, at cost to themselves.”⁵⁴ Because Boyd’s approach neglects God’s appointed way of using governmental power to restrain evil, the result would be the unrestrained growth of violent crime in every community.

At this point, discerning Christians should be able to see a more ominous spiritual component at the heart of Boyd’s position. Who would ultimately profit from persuading Christians that *all government power over evil is wrong and demonic*? Who would

54. *Ibid.*, 31.

ultimately want to eliminate all use of power over evil by those who are followers of Jesus Christ? It would ultimately be Satan himself, who wants no force for good to restrain his evil deeds in the world.

Therefore, at the heart of Greg Boyd's position is *an exact reversal of the role of God and Satan with regard to civil government*. Boyd says that when government exercises power over evil, this itself is demonic and evil. But the Bible tells us that the ruler who exercises power to restrain and punish evil is doing "good" and is "God's servant" (Rom. 13:4).

The "all government is demonic and evil" view is a third wrong view.

D. DO EVANGELISM, NOT POLITICS

A fourth wrong view about Christians and politics is promoted by evangelicals who essentially say, "We should just preach the Gospel, and that is the only way Christians can hope to change people's hearts and change our society." I call this the "do evangelism, not politics" view. It claims that the church is only called to "preach the Gospel," not to preach about politics.

I hear this view expressed quite often in personal conversations. But are there any evangelical authors who actually advocate this view? There are some authors whose writings tend in this direction, even if it is qualified by statements that of course *some* political influence by the church is appropriate—but it will not do any spiritual or eternal good! Consider some statements by Cal Thomas and John MacArthur, two writers for whom (on other topics) I have great appreciation.

Nationally syndicated columnist Cal Thomas has written:

No matter how hard they try to protect the gospel from corruption, ministers who focus on politics and politicians as a means of redemption must minimize their ultimate calling and message. The road to redemption does not run through Washington, D.C. Politicians can't redeem themselves from the temptations of Washington. What makes anyone think they can redeem the rest of us?⁵⁵

John MacArthur, in *Why Government Can't Save You*, wrote the following:

It is all right occasionally to support legitimate measures designed to correct a glaring social or political wrong. . . . A certain amount of healthy and balanced concern about current trends in government and the community is acceptable, as long as we realize that *such interest is not vital to our spiritual lives, our righteous testimony or the advancement of the kingdom of Christ*. Above all, the believer's political involvement should never displace the priority of preaching and teaching the gospel because *the morality and righteousness that God seeks is the result of salvation and sanctification*.⁵⁶

55. Cal Thomas, "Pulpit Bullies," Tribune Media Services (Oct. 3, 2008). See www.calthomas.com/index.php?news=2381. A "do evangelism, not politics" view is also promoted by Greg Boyd's book, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, which I discussed in the previous section.

56. John MacArthur, *Why Government Can't Save You: An Alternative to Political Activism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 8, italics added.

[Jesus] did not come to earth to make the old creation moral through social and governmental reform but to make new creatures (His people) holy through the saving power of the gospel and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷

1. Too narrow an understanding of “the Gospel” and the kingdom of God

While I agree with Thomas and MacArthur on many other things, I cannot agree with their disparagement of the value of Christian political involvement for God’s purposes on this earth. I think it represents too narrow an understanding of the work of God’s kingdom and of the nature of the Christian gospel message.

“The Gospel” in the New Testament is not just “trust Jesus and be forgiven of your sins and grow in holiness and go to heaven” (though that is certainly true, and that is the heart of the Gospel and its foundational message). No, the Gospel is God’s *good news* about all of life! Jesus said,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*” (Matt. 28:19–20).

The phrase “all that I have commanded you” means more than John 3:16, as wonderful as that verse is. *All* that Jesus commanded includes everything that he taught as recorded in the four Gospels. This is because Jesus promised his disciples not only that the Holy Spirit would “bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26), but also that the Holy Spirit “will teach you all things” (v. 26) and will “guide you into all the truth” (16:13).

That is why the apostle Peter could say that “the commandment of the Lord and Savior” came “through your apostles” (2 Peter 3:2), and Paul could say, “The things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). Their epistles are also things that Jesus now commands us! Both the Gospels *and the Epistles* in the New Testament come to us with Jesus’ authority, and he wants us to teach these things to our churches.

What about the Old Testament? Since Jesus and the apostles repeatedly relied on the Old Testament as the Word of God, we also receive the Old Testament Scriptures on the authority of Jesus and his apostles. Therefore, understood in a broad sense, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” means that we should faithfully teach the *entire Bible* to those who become disciples of Jesus. Preaching “the whole Gospel” must also include preaching what the Bible says about civil government. That means that Christians will learn from the Bible how to influence governments for good. And since these things are taught in the Bible, God must count them important for the advance of his kingdom and his purposes on the earth.

Does Christian political activism do any spiritual good? A short answer is that if it is part of what God teaches us in Scripture, then of course it does spiritual good, because it is something that pleases God. “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments”

57. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

(1 John 5:3)—therefore, following his teachings regarding government is one way of showing love to him.

Another answer is provided by Tom Minnery, who looks to the example of Jesus' life. Jesus did not only forgive people's sins; he also healed their physical diseases. Jesus was concerned both about people's spiritual life and about the well-being of their actual physical life in this world. Healing people's physical bodies was doing spiritual good, in God's eyes. Minnery applies this pattern to any social activity we do to improve the state of people's lives:

Social activity not only follows evangelism as its consequence and aim, and precedes it as a bridge, but also accompanies it as its partner. In His own ministry, Jesus went about teaching and preaching, and also doing good and healing. Both were expressions of his compassion for people, and both should be ours.⁵⁸

I cannot therefore agree with John MacArthur's statement about the effect of good and bad governments:

The ideal human government can ultimately do nothing to advance God's kingdom, and the worst, most despotic worldly government in the end cannot halt the power of the Holy Spirit or the spread of God's Word.⁵⁹

I think of the difference between North Korea and South Korea. Even if the dictatorial, oppressive government of North Korea has not *completely* halted the spread of God's Word, its severe persecution has hindered it so much that millions of North Koreans are born, live, and die without ever hearing of Jesus Christ, and North Korea sends out zero missionaries. By contrast, the church in South Korea, where the government has allowed freedom, is growing, thriving, and sending missionaries around the world. Or compare the relatively small, repressed church in Cuba, which is unable to send out any missionaries anywhere, with the growing, thriving churches throughout many Latin American countries that have more freedom. Governments do make a difference to the work of God's kingdom. This is why Paul urged that prayers be made "for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (1 Tim. 2:2). That is, good governments help people to live a "peaceful" and "godly" life, and bad governments hinder that.

Governments can allow churches to meet freely and evangelize or they can prevent these things by force of law (as in Saudi Arabia and North Korea). They can hinder or promote literacy (the latter enabling people to read a Bible). They can stop murderers and thieves and drunk drivers and child predators or allow them to terrorize society and destroy lives. They can promote and protect marriages or hinder and even destroy them. Governments do make a significant difference for the work of God in the world, and we are to pray and work for good governments around the world.

58. Tom Minnery, *Why You Can't Stay Silent: A Biblical Mandate to Shape Our Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), 49.

59. MacArthur, *Why Government Can't Save You*, 7.

2. The “whole Gospel” includes a transformation of society

A second reason that “do evangelism, not politics” is a wrong view is that the whole Gospel includes transformation of society. Yes, forgiveness of sins is absolutely wonderful, and it is the central message of the Gospel. *Of course* we must proclaim forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ alone. *Of course* this is the only way that people’s hearts will be *truly* transformed.

But forgiveness of sins is not the only message of the Gospel. That is because Jesus is looking for transformed lives and through them a transformed world. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). The good news of the Gospel will result in changed lives, but Jesus wants that to result in *changed families* as well. And when the Gospel changes lives, it should also result in *changed neighborhoods*. And *changed schools*. And *changed businesses*. And *changed societies*. So shouldn’t “the Gospel” also result in *changed governments* as well? Of course it should!

And should churches teach their people what the Bible says about God’s will for families? About God’s will for business? About God’s will for educating children? Certainly they should. But then, shouldn’t churches also teach about God’s will for human government? Of course they should! And some Christians are called to implement that teaching in actually influencing governments for good.

It seems to me that the “do evangelism, not politics” view has a mistaken understanding of what is important to God, as if only spiritual (nonmaterial, other-worldly) things matter to him and not the actual circumstances of people’s physical life in this world. That is a philosophical view akin to Platonism, and it is similar to an ancient deviation from Christianity called Gnosticism—but it is not the view of the Bible.

3. Which parts of the Bible should the church not preach about?

A third response to those who say, “The church should just do evangelism and not get involved in politics,” is to ask this question: “What parts of the Bible have you decided not to preach about because you are ‘just going to preach the Gospel’?” Have you decided that you won’t preach on Romans 13:1–7? Or that you won’t preach on 1 Peter 2:13–14? What about Genesis 9:5–6? Or what about the narratives of the Old Testament kings and their good and evil deeds? Are you not going to preach about Daniel’s influence on the government of Babylon? Or on Isaiah’s prophecies to the other nations in Isaiah 13–23? Are you not going to preach on the prophecies to the other nations in Amos 1–2? What parts of the Bible are left out of your preaching by the idea that you’re going to “just preach the Gospel”?

4. God leaves Christians here on earth both to do evangelism and to do good for others

The fourth reason that the “do evangelism, not politics” view is wrong is that it misunderstands the reason why God left Christians on the earth. Think about this for a minute: When people trust in Christ as their Savior and have their sins forgiven, why

does God not snatch them up to heaven immediately? Why does he leave them here on earth? Is it *only* so that they would preach the Gospel to others? Well then, what are *those people* supposed to do after they trust in Christ as Savior? Is their *only* purpose on earth to preach the Gospel to others, or does Jesus want us to do some other things, such as loving our neighbors as ourselves (see Matt. 22:39)?

Clearly, if we are here on earth to glorify God, we will glorify him (in part at least) by obeying the command, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). But that means that I should seek the good of my neighbors in all parts of society. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” means that I should seek *good laws* that will protect preborn children. It means that I should seek *good laws* that protect marriages and families. It means I should seek *good laws* that protect children from the corrupting moral influences that want to use the classroom to teach that all kinds of sexual experimentation outside of marriage are just fine and that there is nothing wrong with pornography.

One reason why Jesus left us here on earth is that we should glorify him *by doing good to other people in all areas of life*. “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Certainly that means that we should do good to others, as we have opportunity, by being a good influence on laws and government and by having a good influence on the political process. Paul says this about Christians:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

Jesus left us here on earth in part because he wants to allow our lives to give glory to him in the midst of a fallen and sinful world: “Let your light shine before others, *so that they may see your good works* and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

So, should churches teach their people how to do “good works” in hospitals and in schools, and in businesses and in neighborhoods, but not in government? Why should that area of life be excluded from the influence of the “good works” of believers that will “give glory to your Father who is in heaven”?

I conclude that Jesus’ command that “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” means that I should seek the good of my neighbors in every aspect of society, *including seeking to bring about good government and good laws*.

5. God established both the church and the government to restrain evil

A fifth reason that the “do evangelism, not politics” view is wrong is that it overlooks the fact that God gave both the church and the government to restrain evil in this age. I agree that *one* significant way that God restrains evil in the world is through changing people’s hearts when they trust in Christ as their Savior (see 2 Cor. 5:17). But we should not turn this *one way* into the *only way* that God restrains evil in this age. God also uses civil government to restrain evil, and there is much evil that can only be restrained by the power of civil government, for there will always be many who do not trust in Christ as their Savior and many who do not fully obey him.

For example, why do we need laws against drunk driving? Someone might say, “We really don’t need laws against drunk driving. The influence of the Gospel should be enough to change society. If Christians were *really* doing their job of witnessing to others, and if Christians were *really* being a good example of sober driving, that would be enough to eliminate all drunk driving in the United States.”

Of course, that is a foolish position. We recognize that in this present age there are many people who do not accept the Gospel. (And sadly, even some of those who do trust in Christ continue to do things as foolish as driving while intoxicated.) Until Christ returns there will always be drunk drivers who will not be persuaded by the Christian Gospel or by their conscience or by the example of others or by common sense. They will still get themselves drunk and then drive on our streets unless there is some other means of restraining this evil than just preaching the Gospel.

The way that God has established to stop drunk drivers in this age is the power of civil government. Government has been “instituted by God” so that it would be “not a terror to good conduct, but to bad” (Rom. 13:1, 3). The *primary* means God uses to stop drunk driving today is for civil government to take away these drunk drivers’ liberty to drive. If they persist in driving anyway, they will go to jail. God restrains drunk driving not merely by preaching the Gospel, but also by the power of the civil government. Government is sent “to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Peter 2:14).

To take another example, when did people in the United States stop owning slaves? It was not when the Gospel had been preached throughout the South, but after the US government made it illegal through the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. That happened when many Christian abolitionists influenced the government of the United States to change its laws (see discussion below).

6. Christians have influenced governments positively throughout history

Historian Alvin Schmidt points out how the spread of Christianity and Christian influence on government was primarily responsible for outlawing infanticide, child abandonment, and abortion in the Roman Empire (in AD 374);⁶⁰ outlawing the brutal battles-to-the-death in which thousands of gladiators had died (in 404);⁶¹ outlawing the cruel punishment of branding the faces of criminals (in 315);⁶² instituting prison reforms such as the segregating of male and female prisoners (by 361);⁶³ stopping the practice of human sacrifice among the Irish, the Prussians, and the Lithuanians as well as among other nations;⁶⁴ outlawing pedophilia;⁶⁵ granting of property rights and other protections to women;⁶⁶ banning polygamy (which is still practiced in some Muslim nations today);⁶⁷ prohibiting the burning alive of widows in India (in 1829);⁶⁸ outlawing the painful and crippling practice of binding young women’s feet in China

60. Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004; formerly published as *Under the Influence*, 2001), 51, 53, 59.

61. *Ibid.*, 63.

62. *Ibid.*, 65.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*, 65–66.

65. *Ibid.*, 87–88.

66. *Ibid.*, 111.

67. *Ibid.*, 115.

68. *Ibid.*, 116–17.

(in 1912);⁶⁹ persuading government officials to begin a system of public schools in Germany (in the sixteenth century);⁷⁰ and advancing the idea of compulsory education of all children in a number of European countries.⁷¹

During the history of the church, Christians have had a decisive influence in opposing and often abolishing slavery in the Roman Empire, in Ireland, and in most of Europe (though Schmidt frankly notes that a minority of “erring” Christian teachers have supported slavery in various centuries).⁷² In England, William Wilberforce, a devout Christian, led the successful effort to abolish the slave trade and then slavery itself throughout the British Empire by 1840.⁷³

In the United States, though there were vocal defenders of slavery among Christians in the South, they were vastly outnumbered by the many Christians who were ardent abolitionists, speaking, writing, and agitating constantly for the abolition of slavery in the United States. Schmidt notes that two-thirds of the American abolitionists in the mid-1830s were Christian clergymen,⁷⁴ and he gives numerous examples of the strong Christian commitment of several of the most influential of the antislavery crusaders, including Elijah Lovejoy (the first abolitionist martyr), Lyman Beecher, Edward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe (author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*), Charles Finney, Charles T. Torrey, Theodore Weld, William Lloyd Garrison, “and others too numerous to mention.”⁷⁵ The American civil rights movement that resulted in the outlawing of racial segregation and discrimination was led by Martin Luther King Jr., a Christian pastor, and supported by many Christian churches and groups.⁷⁶

There was also strong influence from Christian ideas and influential Christians in the formulation of the Magna Carta in England (1215)⁷⁷ and of the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Constitution (1787)⁷⁸ in the United States. These are three of the most significant documents in the history of governments on the earth, and all three show the marks of significant Christian influence in the foundational ideas of how governments should function. These foundations for British and American government did not come about as a result of the “do evangelism, not politics” view.

Schmidt also argues that several specific components of modern views of government also had strong Christian influence in their origin and influence, such as individual human rights, individual freedom, the equality of individuals before the law, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state.⁷⁹

As for the present time, Charles Colson’s insightful book *God and Government*⁸⁰ (previously published as *Kingdoms in Conflict*) reports dozens of encouraging narratives

69. *Ibid.*, 119.

70. *Ibid.*, 179.

71. *Ibid.*, 179–80. Although this is not a matter of merely influencing laws, Schmidt also points out the immense influence of Christians on higher education: By the year 1932 there were 182 colleges and universities in the United States, and of that number, 92 percent had been founded by Christian denominations (p. 190).

72. *Ibid.*, 274–76.

73. *Ibid.*, 276–78.

74. *Ibid.*, 279.

75. *Ibid.*, 279–90.

76. *Ibid.*, 287–89.

77. *Ibid.*, 251–52.

78. *Ibid.*, 253–58.

79. *Ibid.*, 258–70.

80. Charles W. Colson, *God and Government: An Insider’s View on the Boundaries between Faith and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

of courageous, real-life Christians who in recent years, in causes large and small, have had significant impact for good on laws and governments around the world.

Therefore I cannot agree with John MacArthur when he says, “God does not call the church to influence the culture by promoting legislation and court rulings that advance a scriptural point of view.”⁸¹ When I look over that list of changes in governments and laws that Christians incited, I think God *did* call the church and thousands of Christians within the church to work to bring about these momentous improvements in human society throughout the world. Or should we say that Christians who brought about these changes were *not* doing so out of obedience to God? That these changes made *no difference* to God? This cannot be true.

MacArthur says, “Using temporal methods to promote legislative and judicial change . . . is not our calling—and has no eternal value.”⁸² I disagree. I believe those changes listed above were important to the God who declares, “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). God *cares* how people treat one another here on earth, and these changes in government listed above *do* have eternal value in God’s sight.

If the Christian church had adopted the “do evangelism, not politics” view throughout its history, it would never have brought about these immeasurably valuable changes among the nations of the world. But these changes did happen, because Christians realized that if they could influence laws and governments for good, they would be obeying the command of their Lord, “Let your light shine before others, so that they *may see your good works* and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). They influenced governments for good because they knew that “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

7. Doesn’t the Bible say that persecution is coming?

Sometimes people ask me, “Why should we try to improve governments when the Bible tells us that persecution is coming in the end times before Christ returns? Doesn’t that mean that we should expect governments to become more and more anti-Christian?” (They have in mind passages like Matt. 24:9–12, 21–22; 2 Tim. 3:1–5.)

The answer is that we cannot know when Christ will return or when the events preceding his coming will occur (see Matt. 24:36; 25:13). What we do know is that while we have opportunity, God tells us not to give up but to go on preaching “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) and doing “good works” (Eph. 2:10) and loving our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:39). That means we should go on *trying to influence governments for good* as long as we are able to do so.

If all the Christians who influenced governments for good in previous centuries had just given up and said, “Persecution is coming and governments will become more evil,

81. MacArthur, *Why Government Can’t Save You*, 130.

82. *Ibid.*, 15.

so there is nothing we can do,” then none of those good changes in laws would have come about. There would still be human sacrifice and burning of widows alive and slavery and racial discrimination protected by law. That mentality would have been a defeatist, fatalistic attitude, and it would have led Christians to disobey many of God’s commands for how we are to live our lives during this present age. Instead of giving in to such a hopeless attitude, courageous Christians in previous generations sought to do good for others and for governments, and God often blessed their efforts.

8. But won’t political involvement distract us from the main task of preaching the Gospel?

At this point someone may object that while political involvement may have *some* benefits and may do *some* good, it can so easily distract us, turn unbelievers away from the church, and cause us to neglect the main task of pointing people toward personal trust in Christ. John MacArthur writes, “When the church takes a stance that emphasizes political activism and social moralizing, it always diverts energy and resources away from evangelization.”⁸³

Yet the proper question is not, “Does political influence take resources away from evangelism?” but, “Is political influence something God has called us to do?” If God has called some of us to some political influence, then those resources would not be blessed if we diverted them to evangelism—or to the choir, or to teaching Sunday School to children, or to any other use.

In this matter, as in everything else the church does, it would be healthy for Christians to realize that God may call *individual Christians* to different emphases in their lives. This is because God has placed in the church “varieties of gifts” (1 Cor. 12:4) and the church is an entity that has “many members” but is still “one body” (v. 12).

Therefore God might call someone to devote almost all of his or her time to the choir, someone else to youth work, someone else to evangelism, someone else to preparing refreshments to welcome visitors, and someone else to work with lighting and sound systems. “But if Jim places all his attention on the sound system, won’t that distract the church from the main task of preaching the Gospel?” No, not at all. That is not what God has called Jim to emphasize (though he will certainly share the Gospel with others as he has opportunity). Jim’s exclusive focus on the church’s sound system means he is just being a faithful steward in the responsibility God has given him.

In the same way, I think it is entirely possible that God called Billy Graham to emphasize evangelism and say nothing about politics and also called James Dobson to emphasize a radio ministry to families and to influencing the political world for good. Aren’t there enough Christians in the world for us to focus on more than one task? And does God not call us to thousands of different emphases, all in obedience to him?

But *the whole ministry of the church* will include both emphases. And the teaching ministry from the pulpit should do nothing less than proclaim “the whole counsel of

83. *Ibid.*, 14.

God” (Acts 20:27). It should teach, over the course of time, on all areas of life and all areas of Bible knowledge. That certainly must include, to some extent, what the Bible says about the purposes of civil government and how that teaching should apply to our situations today.

This means that in a healthy church we will find that some people emphasize influencing the government and politics, others emphasize influencing the business world, others emphasize influencing the educational system, others entertainment and the media, others marriage and the family, and so forth. When that happens, it seems to me that we should encourage, not discourage, one another. We should adopt the attitude toward each other that Paul encouraged in the church at Rome:

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. . . . So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother (Rom. 14:10–13).

For several different reasons, then, I think the view that says the church should just “do evangelism, not politics” is incorrect.

E. DO POLITICS, NOT EVANGELISM

The fifth view says that the church should just try to change the laws and the culture and should not emphasize evangelism. I do not know of any responsible evangelical leaders or prominent Christian groups today who hold this view or say that Christians should just “do politics, not evangelism.” But this was a primary emphasis of the Social Gospel movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with its campaigns to get the church to work aggressively to overcome poverty, slums, crime, racial discrimination, and other social evils. These were good causes in themselves, but this movement placed little emphasis on the need for individuals to place personal trust in Christ as Savior or the need to proclaim the entire Bible as the Word of God and worthy of our belief. The Social Gospel movement gained followers primarily among liberal Protestants rather than among more conservative, evangelical Protestant groups.

Some writers accuse Christians who emphasize political involvement of holding this “do politics, not evangelism” view. They say some conservative Christians seem to think that voting Republican will save the nation or that we should trust government to save us rather than trusting in God, or they make some similar allegation.

But these seem to me to be attacks against a straw man, a hypothetical opponent that does not really exist. So far as I know, this view has not been advocated by leaders at Focus on the Family, the Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council, the 700 Club, Concerned Women for America, the Alliance Defense Fund, the American Center for Law and Justice, or previous organizations such as Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority. No responsible leader that I know in those or similar organizations advocates seeking to change government instead of doing evangelism. In fact, many of the evangelical leaders

who are involved in seeking to influence government have been active evangelists, such as the late D. James Kennedy, who preached regularly on biblical perspectives on political issues and whose *Evangelism Explosion*⁸⁴ book and program provided much encouragement to personal evangelism among many thousands of evangelicals.

Not once have I heard any Christian in any of these groups say, “Good government will save us” or “If we just win this election we do not have to pray or do evangelism or seek change in people’s hearts.” Not once have I heard anyone say, “We should trust government and not God”!

Yet Christians who encourage greater Christian involvement in politics need to hear an important word of caution: If we (and I include myself here) ever begin to think that *good laws alone* will solve a nation’s problems or bring about a righteous and just society, we will have made a huge mistake. Unless there is simultaneously an inner change in people’s hearts and minds, good laws alone will only bring about grudging, external compliance with the minimum level of obedience necessary to avoid punishment. Good government and good laws can prevent much evil behavior, and they can teach people what society approves, but they cannot by themselves produce good people. Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson rightly caution, “But we who are Christians are deluded if we think we will change our culture solely through political power.”⁸⁵

Genuine, long-term change in a nation will only happen (1) if people’s *hearts* change so that they seek to do good, not evil; (2) if people’s *minds* change so that their moral convictions align more closely with God’s moral standards in the Bible; and (3) if a nation’s *laws* change so that they more fully encourage good conduct and punish wrong conduct. Item 1 comes about through personal evangelism and the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Item 2 takes place both through personal conversation and teaching and through public discussion and debate. Item 3 comes about through Christian political involvement. All three are necessary.

Whether it comes from the liberal Social Gospel movement or perhaps from evangelicals who might be tempted to think that political victories will solve everything, this “do politics, not evangelism” view is certainly wrong. The church must above all proclaim that “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). People definitely have a change in their hearts when they believe in Christ: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

What then? Is there a correct view that is different from these five wrong views? The view I propose in the next chapter is “significant Christian influence on government.” “Significant Christian influence on government” is not *compulsion* (view 1), it is not *silence* (view 2), and it is not *dropping out of the process* (views 3 and 4), nor is it thinking *the government can save people* (view 5). It is different from each of these wrong views, and I think it is much closer to the actual teaching of the Bible.

84. D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1977).

85. Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson, *Blinded By Might: Why the*

Religious Right Can't Save America (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 51.