



“MOM AND POP”

TWO-KINGDOM PAPERS

*“A CHRISTIAN PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY FOR LIFE
FOR THE AVERAGE JOE AND JOSEPHINE”*

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These “Mom and Pop” papers are designed to present the foundational concepts of the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty about living a Two Kingdom life in today’s culture.

These papers are designed to be read and studied. The questions at the end of each paper serve as discussion starters. Please feel free to go beyond these questions.

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GOD IS AT WORK IN THE WORLD TO BLESS – TWO DISTINCT WAYS

Jesus said a very interesting thing in Luke 20:25, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are Gods.” And later to Pontus Pilate, the governor of Judea, who claimed that he had authority over Jesus himself, Jesus responded....“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.”(John 19:11). Wow...God is at work. He saves the world through the person and work of Jesus, THAT’S THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE.

But to make sure that message “gets out” for all to hear.... God keeps the world civil, humane, just, and safe (outwardly) through people like Pilate. So God is at work in the world in two distinct ways....one to keep things civil, humane, just through His created orders of Family, Work, and Government....Or, as I like to say....God works through Fathers, Mothers, Businesspeople, and Leaders....broken and sinful as they are, He still works through them to prevent, chaos, all Hell from breaking loose.....That’s God’s left hand Kingdom rule, His engagement to bless. Of course, that’s not the “good news,” the great news of His Salvation by grace through faith in the person and work of Jesus.....But that “left-hand Kingdom work of God,” through even “relatively, moral” unbelievers is part of His work of blessing too.

When Christians engage the Public realm, full of philosophies, ideologies, and appetites emanating from sinful, broken people just like us.... we know that there is work to do to keep things sane, humane, just, and safe. But that work is part of God’s greater work to get the ultimate message of Christ out there for all to hear. Keep it safe, so the Church can speak. Keep it just, so chaos is kept at bay. Give us “rules to live by” in peace, so there can be opportunities to share a message of Grace over the fences of neighbors living side by side in peace. God’s ways, Two distinct ways, Two Kingdoms, Two

specific types of engagement, ONE MISSION...TO ULTIMATELY BLESS THE WORLD NOW AND FOREVER.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the government (God's left-hand kingdom) bless all people?
2. How does God bless people even when the rulers (parents, police, government leaders) act contrary to God's Law?
3. How do we participate in keeping things "sane, humane, just, and safe"?

TWO-KINGDOMS – CHURCH AND STATE?

When the Bible teaches that God engages the World for the sake of the world in two distinct ways, modern people tend to hear “Church and State” alone. Or, even worse, they hear the “separation of Church and State,” as if the Church needs to avoid having a voice in the public sphere of things in American culture. The Bible doesn’t teach such a nice, neat package. And, the founding Fathers of America weren’t afraid of too much “church” in society. They were afraid of too much power being amassed in an overarching government.

So, what’s the point? Well, when talking about “Church and State,” remember that the Bible sees this in a much bigger picture. Both the Church and the State are public entities under God’s authority and direction. But, the State, the public ordering of the world for the sake of civility and temporal justice and peace, that doesn’t just include politics and law-enforcement, that includes the vocations of Father and Mother, families....that includes the value and purpose of “work and enterprise.” That includes the various ways that people seek to serve those they love and care about with honest enterprise and committed friendship and love. When these things are ordered well, the Bible’s view on this is that “Believers strive for excellence in all they do to give God glory and to serve others in His Name.” A country that seeks to set that attitude “free,” is one that will find a way to put Church and State in proper tension and balance.

In fact, the Two-Kingdom view of life sees the wonderful value of a government working well within its boundaries, and the powerful potential of a culture that is free to hear the Gospel unrestrained. To that end, a Christian, Two-Kingdom citizen is “**Set Free, to live freely for others in Christ.**” They are ready to put their “**Temporal liberties to work to proclaim and embody the eternal liberties of Christ.**” Even the Apostle Paul put his Roman Citizenship to work for the sake of the Gospel in Acts 16.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the danger of the left-hand kingdom amassing too much power over the right-hand kingdom?
2. What is the danger of the right-hand kingdom amassing too much power over the left-hand kingdom?
3. What does it mean to put your temporal liberties to work to proclaim and embody the eternal liberties of Christ?

CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT OF THE WORLD – DYNAMIC DIFFERENTIATION

Again, Jesus' words in Luke 20:25 guide us....Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's. The question for "public" engagement of issues and policies, is what does God desire of Caesar? And, what does God want His people to do in support of Caesar. In Romans 13, Paul writes....

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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ 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, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Give honor to the work, respect to those in authority but realize that their leadership can't solve the big issues of life. Power can control bad folks to a degree. What is finally needed is a changed heart, and the Bible says that only the message of the Gospel in Jesus Christ can do that. So, when it comes to public engagement, Christians realize that we are to be "Dynamically engaged," yes, but to realize that God works to bless in very different ways through His Two-Kingdom blessing. He curbs evil through government and taxes; He blesses the common good through people getting married, having children, and working hard to take care of one another, but His ultimate work is to bring salvation to all as a gift. Law and Gospel, Kingdom of the Left

– Kingdom of the Right. We take them both seriously, but one is for a time, one is forever. Differentiating between the two is key!

In America, it gets even better since the constitution sets up the citizen, the disciplined, religious citizen as the “Caesar.” So Paul’s admonition brings more work for the 2 Kingdom citizen to do. We don’t just need to honor those elected officials, we too need to be honorable. We don’t merely submit to the laws of the land, we get to participate in creating those laws for the good of all. Even there, God gives us wisdom through His Word, but the wisdom of the Law can be seen in God’s created order too. To that end....be Dynamic....get involved, but realize what is ultimate, what is fundamental, and what is the best that sinners can do to keep the peace and which ones matter most!

IF THAT’S TRUE....AND WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS.....then it calls for Christians to be a unique kind of citizen no matter what country they are in....but in America, it gives us a wonderful way to exercise citizenship as free people for others.

Discussion Questions:

1. To be dynamic means to be actively engaged. How is God dynamic in the left-hand kingdom?
2. To be dynamic means to be actively engaged. How is God dynamic in the right-hand kingdom?
3. The first line of the United States Constitution states that “We the people” are the ones that establishes the laws. How does that impact our being involved in the enactment and enforcement of these laws?

**CHRISTIAN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT -
REFORMATION RESTRAINT..... CAUTIOUS
BECAUSE OF OUR CALLOUSNESS, SUSPICIOUS
OF PURITAN, UTOPIAN ABSOLUTISM**

Oh, there is so much to be angry about today it seems, right? Everyone thinks that they have the answers that will make everything better, or do we? When it comes to radical changes, a 2 Kingdom citizen probably will be hesitant at first. Why? Well, there's that teaching that God is at work in the world in the left-hand Kingdom, even through people who might not be believers in Him. Crazy right? Not really. When you understand what God is doing through His left hand Kingdom, you can understand how He can even use "sinful, unbelieving" people to keep things relatively peaceful and temporally just. There are people right now who are doing a "good" job in their vocations as politicians, police, entrepreneurs, business people, even fathers and mothers, whose "heart may not be totally in it," but they know they need to do the right thing for others in their work. Is that optimal? No. But God can even work through that to keep a nation, a community, or even just a neighborhood from imploding.

In Romans 13, the Bible teaches a basic relationship to all authority that is honoring, holding it in respect. It is not "absolute," for the Bible teaches that when such authority, which is under God's left-hand Kingdom rule, oversteps its boundaries or teaches something contrary to the fundamental teaches of the Bible (see Acts 5:29), the Apostle Peter teaches that "we must obey God rather than men." But even here it is not with a rebellious heart, but a heart that wants what is best for others as well as oneself. Reformation Restraint...is the belief that God is at work in the world, and He is ultimately seeking the best for each person. Jesus himself tells us that "all authority in heaven and on earth" has been given to Him. Restraint, even if it becomes proper resistance in time, eagerly waits to see what God is up to first. Count on it.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to you to practice restraint when it comes to left-hand kingdom involvement?
2. What is the advantage of practicing restraint when it comes to responding to political, cultural, and social issues?
3. Why does the Christian practice restraint when it comes to open rebellion against a law?

SEPARATION OR INTERSECTION OF CHURCH AND STATE?

This fall, our nation is debating the aptitude and viability of a candidate for a life-long appointment to the Supreme Court of the United States. The process has become vitriolic over the years as political partisanship has infected the examination process to the point where people want to know how you would vote” on this issue or that, rather than determining whether or not you are qualified for this position. Recently, even a person’s religious convictions have been on trial, as political appointees have been asked “religious litmus test” questions to determine their fitness for public service. One Senator even insinuated that believing in the uniqueness of Jesus as the world’s Savior is discriminatory, making one unfit for public service in America. Wow! Does it really? Actually, not at all. That’s one reason why the founders had no “religious test” for public service. So, where do we go from here?

First, one should be able to speak about the relationship of the Christian tradition to the constitutional liberties that we hold so dear. The very foundations of individual rights and responsibilities, the right to public property, the right to redress the government, the protection of the rule of law for all...these fundamental principles are rooted in a biblical worldview of culture. So much so that those who are alarmed by the idea of committed Christians being in influential, public positions miss the point. The Judeo-Christian tradition, with its emphasis on the rule of law and the dignity of the individual before the law, forms the foundation of the very liberties that our branches of government are sworn to protect. (See Adam MacLeod’s article, “Why Judge Kavanaugh’s Religion Should Be an Issue,” for a more detailed discussion of the biblical and cultural roots of the rule of law tradition.¹)

¹http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/07/22211/?utm_source=The+Witherspoon+Institute&utm_campaign=ifbbb61966-RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_15ce6af37b-ifbbb61966-84114721

Why does all this matter? Well, in our culture, judges are supposed to be able to understand the law, respect the law, and, most importantly, not create the law. The separation of the branches of government, which often frustrates the intentions of politicians, be they part of the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, or the Judiciary, was philosophically by design. The branches were meant to be limited in their sphere, even in competition with each other at times, so that the political, coercive power of the government would not coalesce in one place alone to the detriment of the citizen's individual freedom. The limiting of their sphere of influence and the clear differentiation of their work from one another are the safeguards of liberty for us all.

Ironically, the Christian tradition, with Christ's injunction to "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's," undergirds this type of differentiation and limitation even further. Christians, especially devoted Christians, understand that their calling in the world is to be faithful within the vocations to which they are called. With the Christian tradition being the intellectual seedbed for many of the constitutional ideals that we enjoy and the judicial "rule of law" perspective that guards such freedoms, maybe it's time to really understand why Judge Kavanaugh's religion should be an issue. Or maybe it's better to stay with the perspective of the Founders who would emphasize that a Supreme Court justice needs to understand and respect the law, but not create the law, and leave it at that.

Discussion Questions:

1. Can a Christian enforce laws that are Constitutional, but appear non-Christian?
 2. Do laws compel a Christian's actions?
 3. What are the checks and balances among the branches of government and what is the danger of ignoring them?
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RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND THE POWER OF REFORMATION RESTRAINT!

There's power in restraint. I know that's not a popular, public position today but it is the position that our faith challenges of us as Christians. I realize that in many ways it also sounds counter intuitive. How can there be power in prayerfully gathering the facts, tempering one's emotions, and trying to see the whole context of an issue? Don't things get done when people passionately protest? Don't things change when people "have had enough" and are motivated to just "do something, anything" as long as they are committed to the cause? It's true, that kind of activity can change things. The only question is whether such change is ultimately for our good.

"Restraint seeking the truth" or what we at LCRL call "Reformation Restraint" realizes that God is already at work in the world to keep the peace through His rule of the world through His Left-Hand kingdom of Power. And, it recognizes that we as sinful people usually have a very limited perspective on how evil is truly kept in check and ultimately vanquished (Remember Peter literally rebuking Jesus when He talked about the cross in Matthew 16?). When Jesus tells us to "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's," that doesn't sound right. What if Caesar is corrupt? What if the authorities are seemingly only in it for themselves? "Restraint seeking the truth" knows that God is in control to preserve the world even as He saves it. Such restraint lays on the believer the challenge to put liberty to work prayerfully, to think before one acts.

Keep that in mind especially when passions run deep. Honoring the vocations of elected officials, of officers, of parents and teachers, is not just a traditional nicety, it is an acknowledgment that God is at work in those vocations for the sake of the community and the common good sometimes even in spite of them. And it challenges us to seek the truth of a situation before we take our stand on what we believe is right for the community.

In St. Louis, back in August, 2014, the city erupted with the shooting of Michael Brown. In the middle of the chaos, the violent protests, and the general unrest, there was this pastor from the Wellspring Methodist Church, Pastor Willis Johnson who embodied a “restraint seeking the truth” attitude that provided a healthy way forward through the Ferguson unrest. His account was community focused, somewhat restrained because the facts were still unknown, sympathetic to both Brown and the officer, and focused on maintaining a dialogue between the police and the protestors, while seeking to maintain a civility that would serve the community. He said,

“I don’t live to far from the Ferguson police station.... (I went to the police station) ...For about three hours, I stayed with young people who were obviously upset, frustrated, and angered. The group of young people wanted to get some answers, and they were really going to rush the police station. And I’m sure I was not the only person there that said, “Well, maybe that’s not the best of ideas.” (I further said to them). “I live here. I pastor the church down the street. Not that I’m important but I think maybe I can go into the police station....(I did). They (the police) buzzed me into the station because somebody at the front desk knew who I was. And I said, “Hey, I know this is a very, very tense situation and you all have a group of folk out here who are demanding answers. ...I know that you probably can’t talk to them. But is there any way I can talk to somebody here and explain the situation?””²

Pastor Johnson’s actions demonstrated Reformation Restraint in action....he was a person involved in the community, one who was known by the police and the leaders, one sympathetic to the members of the community, but also respecting God-given authorities and seeking to preserve the foundations for future restorative action. As you think of the issues in the community today that seem to demand our action, remember the purpose of the engagement. Remember that God is at work in many and various ways already, through moms and

² Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 21.

dads, police and political leaders, and the business owners and leaders as well. Keep that in mind as you seek to undergird their work and hold it accountable as well. And finally, remember this, keeping the temporal peace is ultimately for the sake of proclaiming the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, who is the only one who can change hearts and save lives eternally. That's a liberty worth putting to work for the sake of the community and the Gospel.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the danger of acting too fast? Too slow?
2. What do you do to undergird, yet hold accountable, leaders in your community?
3. What is the comfort knowing that God is in control?

“SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE” – A MESSAGE FROM THE CHURCH? WHO KNEW?

For the next two weeks, we are going to be talking about two articles that underscore the influence of a healthy, public relationship of the Church and the State in a free and freeing society. Today, we start with the realization that the “separation of the public authority of the Church and the State,” *is not a modern invention*, but a reflection of a unique Christian voice in the public square even today. In the article linked below, by Paul R. DeHart, titled, “The First Amendment Didn't Separate Church and State—Christianity Did,” the author argues persuasively that the American experiment is rooted in a healthy understanding of the differentiation of the public, adjudicatory spheres of religion/conscience (the Church) in tension with those of the realm of the State.

This “separation” is not some modern creation of an all-encompassing, secular State, privatizing all things religious. Therefore, any modern-day understanding of “separation” must deal with the fact that such separation reflects an ancient, Christian public square proclamation of two sovereigns, Caesar and Jesus Christ—each with its authority, one temporal, one eternal—presciently present already in the first three centuries after Christ. Also to be noted, the very roots of separation go deeper as Jesus himself differentiates these realms when He taught, “Give to Caesar what is Caesars and give to God what is God's,” and when He instructed Roman Governor Pontius Pilates that “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above.” (John 19:11).

So, what's the point? Uniquely, In America... this Constitutional, First Amendment perspective— this separation— was for the sake of the Church, the Citizen, and the rights of the individual to pursue life, liberty, and happiness as rights from God. If there is a separation, it is for the sake of the limitation of the coercive power of the State. And, the “limited” State's role then is primarily to protect free people, driven by conscience and faith, to be a self-governing people of a more perfect union. The limiting of the “federal” reach of the State

and the freeing of the individual, self-disciplined, religious citizen was a first amendment exercise that honored the rights of those created by God, already on God's terms.

From the Bible's perspective, this separation is more like "differentiation." At the LCRL, we call it "**Dynamic Differentiation**," that is, the Bible declares that God is at work (**dynamic**) in the world two distinct ways (**differentiated**), to bless and ultimately to save. God is at work through the vocations of fathers, mother, business people, magistrates, law-enforcement etc. in His Left-Hand rule primarily to preserve not transform the world, curbing the vices and sinful ambitions of people through outward law and order. That's why Jesus could even call His followers to give Caesar prayerful respect in that endeavor, though Caesar may not have deserved much else. Christians also understand God's public work of saving the world through His Son Jesus Christ, is to be offered as gift through His Right-Hand rule in His Church. Such a public proclamation/truth calls all people to faith, especially those who realize that even a "more perfect union" falls woefully short of God's ultimate intention for the world, eternal, abundant life with God as a gift.

Who knew that the genius of the separation/differentiation of Church and State was not a modern invention, but a very old idea rooted in God's two ways of working in the world? Who knew that separation was the first charge against the church in its public witness of Jesus in the Roman Empire? And who knew that such a healthy separation, such a proper respect for the public realms of God through Caesar and God through Jesus, would help produce a constitutional Republic that has evidenced some of the greatest temporal freedoms to humanity. And, that such constitutional protections, would at the same time allow for the proclamation that there is a greater freedom for those who believe in God's greatest work in Christ for all. Who knew?

<http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/04/21381/> (*A note to the reader - The link to the article does not necessarily imply full agreement with the article in its entirety)

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the fact that the left and right-hand kingdoms were separated by Jesus give perspective and insight to the notion of the separation of the kingdoms today?
2. Did the Constitution protect the State from the Church or the Church from the State? Why is that important today?
3. Would it be more appropriate to talk about separation or intersection of Church and State? Give examples.

“TWO-KINGDOMS – PUBLIC VOCATIONS FOR SERVICE” – A MESSAGE WHOSE TIME HAS COME!

Last week we talked about the genius of “Dynamic Differentiation,” the understanding that God is at work in the world to bless and to save. Through government—sinful and broken as it might be—God is at work to preserve the world from peoples’ vice-filled intentions. Through the Church, God is at work offering His grace, forgiveness, life, and salvation to all who realize that even their best efforts aren’t enough, to those who repent and put their faith in His work through His Son Jesus. Two ways, God at work....to bless and save.

Today we talk about a different way to be *publicly active* in the world as part of God’s work in the realm of “Caesar.” In today’s world, people often think that “all things are political.” We didn’t always think this way. Do you remember, just a few years ago, people used to say, “Don’t make a federal case about it.” Today, virtually everything seems to be a federal case. A Two-Kingdom, public philosophy offers a third way, a vocational way that all can embrace to serve others for the common good.

In an excellent article in *First Things* titled, “Two-Kingdom Theology in the Trump Era” by LCMS member Lyman Stone, he argues that Luther, reflecting on how God engages the world His two ways, expanded the notion of “vocation” and literally changed the world. The changes for the individual, the citizen in society, were profound. No longer would the average person be insignificant in their service. No longer would only the vocations of the elites, whether in church or in government, matter. Now, each person in their God-given station in life had the potential to be part of God’s persevering work. And, Luther’s view on vocation elevated the common person to the point where people began to think of average people not as “subjects” but as a “citizens.” Incredible!

So, what’s the point? Well, take this to heart. Not everything is political and that’s good news. If you think things must change here in Washington D.C., I agree with you. But that doesn’t change the

fact that the most influential place where one can serve is with one's family, one's community, with one's neighbors and friends. To be the best father, mother, leader, business person, teacher, policeman, alderman, school board member, etc....that's where our influence will always be its greatest. To be active in the neighborhood for the sake of the neighborhood, that's a third way to "be involved."

In my work in Washington D.C., my main role is to be active in protecting the First Amendment, public rights of our Churches, Schools, and Universities. And, the good news is this. Right now, the federal government seems to be heeding our voice and protecting those liberties more than in the recent past. For that we are grateful, and for that we will continue to diligently fight. But the purpose of that effort is to show the world that ultimately the best general service for the community's blessing is not a "government thing," it's a neighbor to neighbor thing, where we all seek to look out for each other first, calling for the coercive powers of the government only when it can't be solved any other way. Look to the stations in which God has planted you. Undergird the ones around you with prayer and encouragement. And look across the fence to your neighbor first before calling the "911 of public policy" as your solution. We'll all be glad we did in the end.

<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/04/two-kingdom-theology-in-the-trump-era>

Discussion Questions:

1. How is it that the best way to change the government is to first change the neighborhood?
2. Why is it best to seek first to resolve issues between persons rather than involve the government?
3. How can even the lowest vocation be part of God's preserving work??

VOCATIONAL RESPECT SEEKING JUSTICE!

“Abolish ICE!” “Censure the police!” “Accept no limitations!” Such are the cries of a particular segment of American politics today. The other side says, “Support the police,” “be Law-abiding citizens” emphasizing the honoring of law-enforcement, and the civilizing force of law and order over chaos and violence. How should a Two-Kingdom engagement of these issues proceed? Who is right? Who is wrong? Is it all just your perspective versus mine, your experience versus mine?

Here the Bible can give us some direction as to how to engage these kinds of divisive issues. In Romans 13:1-2, St. Paul instructs God’s people saying,

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

There is a priority, then, to one’s engagement with the “authorities.” Much like the 4th Commandment calls us to honor our fathers and mothers, prioritizing a “be subject first” attitude that honors what God has set in place for our good exists in our relationship to those with authority over us in society even today. The word “rebel” in the text doesn’t just imply mere disagreement or protest, but a total disregard for those in authority; it ultimately exposes our rebelliousness against God’s authority over our lives as well.

But does such a “be subject first” attitude mean that we as citizens blindly follow whomever is in charge? Hardly. The apostles themselves guide us here. In Acts 5:29, Peter said, “We must obey God rather than men.” Here, such civil “disobedience” was not rooted merely in a passionate objection, or an offended will; it was rooted in the prioritizing of God’s clearly defined will over and against the fickle will of those in authority that day. That spirit would also temper

our freedom and our exercise of our own will both towards God and towards one another.

When engaging the authorities then, especially those that are legitimate, legally established, and consented to, there should be vocational respect for their position and for the laws that hold us all in common. And, if there yet be any challenges to such legitimate authority due to injustice, they should be engaged lawfully and orderly, for God is a god of order and peace (I Cor. 14:33).

In the American context, there's a unique wrinkle to this discussion as well. The constitutional limitation of coercive authority describes the citizen's (the one in subjection) authority to delineate the degree of that subjectivity. In fact, the citizen, with the God-given, inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, has the constitutional obligation to work toward legally defining the boundaries of those in authority explicitly for the enduring of that freedom. As Christians, we are reminded here as well, that even in freedom we "should obey God not men," even when those men or women are we, ourselves.

An LCRL rule of thumb for public engagement then, especially when it is controversial, is that our attitude should be one of "vocational respect that seeks justice." This means seeking to honor those in authority as a rule, and, when necessary, also correcting their leadership if we must, but in a spirit of order and peace. Why? Because true justice and lasting peace are beyond our efforts to perfectly create and maintain. Therefore it's best to be willing to let God do His preserving work through those in authority, while also putting our full faith in God's saving work in Christ for all. Vocational respect seeks justice as an antidote to tyranny, anarchy, and chaos. But, it is no substitute for the ultimate justice, mercy, and peace that comes from the person and work of Jesus alone. The former is intended to provide opportunities to proclaim and live within the latter. That's something to always keep in mind, especially when issues become heated and passionate.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does disobeying speed limits show rebellion against God?
2. What is the procedure Christians use to change disagreeable laws?
3. When is it proper to legally define the limitations the government places on the citizens?

NO UTOPIANISM ALLOWED

One of the hardest things to read in the Bible is when, in John 16:33, Jesus says, “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” Paraphrase....This world is a broken, sinful, even evil place. And Jesus didn’t come to make an evil place a bit better. He came to bring a brand new, eternal Kingdom because of His work in this world for all. So, when it comes to perfection, eternal life, that’s a God thing on God’s terms by God’s work for all. But we live in this world with that comfort and peace. We live in this broken world and in many ways we are trying to make it the best place it can be while proclaiming that “you ain’t seen nothing yet” if you put your trust in God.

So, how should we handle those temporal questions about how to get along with each other in this world? How should we organize ourselves for the sake of liberty, justice, and peace. Well, whatever way you try to do that, don’t forget the fundamental truths. You are dealing with sinful, broken people through and through. Whatever policy or temporal solution you put forth, there are going to be side-effects and tradeoffs. Why? Sinful people never are going to get things perfectly right and as someone has said, “The demand for perfection is often the enemy of a “good” solution.”

No utopianism here because this world is always going to be “full of trouble.” So here’s some practical how to’s when thinking about what to vote for, what to vote on, or how to engage in conversations with others about what might be better for us all....It’s always a “Tradeoffs conversation.” If someone asks you about public issues or topics, you might say, “Compared to what?” There will always be unforeseen consequences and side-effects. The key through it all would be to create the most good while tempering the most bad, and always realize that God has the final answer in all these things anyway.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why will every form of human government ultimately fail?
2. What can the Christian contribute to society's efforts to organize ourselves for the sake of liberty, justice, and peace?
3. Why is it often the best course of action to settle for the best of two evils?

HONOR YOUR LOCAL SHERIFF, SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL FAMILIES

A Christian, 2 Kingdom citizen realizes that God is at work in the world two distinct ways to bless. In the “Left-Hand” kingdom engagement, God actually works through the orders of His creation as well as through the blessings of good government. So many of the issues that we face today are some form of breakdown in these orders or through these public vocations. But, so many things are tied together, are in relationship with each other.

A healthy society can be traced back to healthy families, healthy children, strong moms and dads in the home. In those places where those relationships, that institution of marriage and family is strong, police and government can actually be “limited” because people are disciplined and motivated to do right by one’s own, and to do right by one’s community. When such things break down....when fathers and mothers stand down, often vocations of force tend to rise up to curb potential violence or discord.

The Romans 13 view of life is also predicated on the fourth commandment view of life where the Bible teaches that we are to “honor our father and mother that it may be well with us and that we may live long on the earth.” Honor our local authorities yes, but support and encourage strong families....that’s a Two-Kingdom dialogue that can bless a community.

So, the key to any discussion about policy or public solutions for a sinful, broken world like ours is always a “compared to what,” discussion. In a world that cannot fix itself, the solutions will always bring tradeoffs. But, just because we can’t create perfect solutions, that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t want the “better” solutions in our communities and neighborhoods. Even the Apostles were blessed by the “Peace of Rome,” and the good roads which provided opportunities for sharing the Gospel and living in peace among others.

Discussion Questions:

1. God always establishes authorities to preserve order, what must rise up if police stand down?
2. What must rise up if parents are absent?
3. What benefits does today's Christian enjoy because of the left-hand kingdom authorities?

WHAT WOULD JESUS DO? OR, WHAT WOULD THE FATHER DO?

Christians often confuse their involvement in public issues on morality or policy by citing the phrase “What would Jesus do?” Unfortunately, that confuses the way the Bible talks about how God works in the world. In general, the church teaches that the Father is the creator of the world, the one who orders the world, and we can see that ordering throughout the cultures of the world and in the consciences of people in the world. The Bible also teaches that the Father sent His Son Jesus to redeem and restore the world through His cross and resurrection. So, what’s the point? Well, when it comes to how the church should seek to reach out to people, to share the Good news of the Gospel... That’s a “What would Jesus do?” type of question. That’s a turn the other cheek type of answer. That’s a “serve others as God in Christ serves you.” That’s how God orders His Right-Hand Kingdom work, the work of His church.

But that’s not how He orders governments and magistrates and law-enforcement etc. That’s a “What would God the Father do?” type of question. That’s a “if a person won’t work, neither shall he eat,” type of issue. That’s a “let the punishment fit the crime,” type of issue. That’s a husbands, wives, fathers, mothers...be committed to each other, submit to each other, love each other and love and discipline your children; children respect your parents type of issue. “What would God the Father do,” is a question of how to order a safe, prosperous, and humane world with sinful, broken people at the helm. God the Father does that through the fundamental laws written in the hearts of people. The common dignity afforded to all people because they are created by God, that’s a foundation for a civil society. The challenge to encourage strong families, Fathers, Mothers, having and raising children in the context of love and respect, that can ward off many ills. Honoring the temporal liberties of freedom of religion and freedom of speech so that people can freely serve

others, that's a temporal life worth striving for. What would the "Father have us do?" I think that in the American Context it is that we are to "put our temporal liberties to work for the sake of the common good and for the sake of the proclamation of the eternal liberties that only Christ can give as a gift.

WHAT WOULD JESUS DO? OR, WHAT WOULD THE FATHER DO? It's a both/and thing!

Discussion Questions:

1. In what circumstances would it be appropriate to follow the "What would Jesus do?" admonition?
2. In what circumstances would it be appropriate to follow the "What would the Father do?" admonition?
3. What is the best way Christians can use temporal liberties to proclaim the eternal liberties only Jesus provides?

WHAT WOULD JESUS “REALLY” DO?

In our culture today, Christians often speak about their “ethics” and service to neighbors and friends in light of the question, “What would Jesus do?” The Bible encourages this when it says in Phil. 2, “Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus.” What follows is a call to humility, to service, to submission to the things of God that concerns itself with others rather than oneself.

For Christians, this is a vital question indeed as we seek to live our lives in imitation of the one who died and rose to forgive our sins and to make us new creations through Baptism. We walk in the newness of life, no longer serving ourselves, but serving others as Christ our Lord and His apostles all teach.

“Turn the other cheek; forgive as you have been forgiven, love as God in Christ loves you,” are the marching orders of God’s people in the world to proclaim His saving good news of the Gospel.

The question “What would Jesus do?” is often misunderstood though with regards to God’s work in the Left-Hand Kingdom, even Christian involvement in the things of Caesar. Many think the answer to “what would Jesus do?” is the same for the individual Christian as it is for the government or those living in their vocations in service to the state.

It is important to note that Jesus did not teach that the government should behave like the Church. Jesus did not teach His disciples to work to make the government turn the other cheek. The Apostle Paul taught that the government is given the authority of the sword to punish. That does not sound like turning the other cheek.

When it comes to understanding God’s left-hand kingdom, we should probably ask, “What would Jesus ‘really’ do?” He would doubtlessly say, “Honor the work of God the Father in His preserving work through the things created to order this world.” Honor your Father, your Mother; If a person won’t work, neither shall he eat; Submit yourselves to the authorities that are meant to order things for

everyone's good; Yes, even Give to Caesar's the things that are Caesar's.

Jesus exemplified this perspective when he talked the governor Pilate, who pointed out to Jesus that he controlled His destiny, His very life. Jesus reminded Pilate that the only power he had was "given to him from above." Jesus submitted Himself to Pilate's God-given power. Jesus literally accomplished the world's salvation through the pathetic leadership of Pilate, and the blood thirstiness of a mob who cajoled Pilate to use his authority for the supposed "peace of the community."

One way that American's can honor the preserving work of God in the world is to approach it with Jesus's submission to the Father's will, with an understanding of how God is at work in the things of this world to ensure temporal peace and justice. We can even remind "Caesar," the political and law-enforcing powers, that they are to receive the things that God has ordained for them, no more, no less.

What would Jesus really do? He would honor the Father's preserving work in the world always with His eyes set on the cross and resurrection as the only long-term solution to the things that really matter. What would Jesus do? What would the Father do? Remember, God is at work: in the Church and in the government. God is at work to bless and to ultimately save the world.

Discussion Questions:

1. Whose Biblical responsibility is it to resolve issues such as homelessness, poverty, and elder care?
2. Why is often easy to pass taxes to feed the hungry and redistribute wealth to the poor?
3. How is it possible to remind left-hand authorities that they should not be involved in right-hand activities?

NOT EVERYTHING IS A “POLITICAL” ISSUE

Jeremiah 29 tells God’s people to do something that is key for any Christians involvement in the culture in which it lives. Ready? Even when living in a “hostile, or unfriendly environment,”

⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (Jeremiah 29:6-7).

Translation....do the basic things for a healthy community and then seek to be a blessing there with the wisdom from the God who created us for liberty and life, righteousness and peace.

There are ways to be a blessing for others that are bigger than the winner of the election or the passing of a law. It is living a public life for the sake of one’s neighbor. There’s an attitude that God’s people bring to a world that tends to politicize everything. In the ancient world, the motto was “Don’t do to others, what you don’t want done to you.” Jesus turned that all around when He said, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” And, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” That’s something to strive for even when the political winds don’t blow one’s way.

James Davison Hunter argues in his book, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*³, we should strive to be a “faithful presence” that

³ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010),

strives to do good for others faithful to the Scriptures just because that is the life of faith this side of heaven. He says,

Let me finally stress that any good that is generated by Christians is *only* the net effect of caring for something more than the good created. *If there are benevolent consequences of our engagement with the work, in other words, it is precisely because it is **not** rooted in a desire to change the world for the better but rather because it is an expression of a desire to honor the creator of all goodness, beauty, and truth, a manifestation of our loving obedience to God, and a fulfillment of God's command to love our neighbor.*⁴

Faithful presence, free to be faithful in Christ to others, faith towards God and fervent love towards neighbor....not everything public is political. Let's strive to create those organizations of care that flow from our concern for others even as we tell the government to get out of the business of the Church.

Discussion Questions:

1. How and when will Christians work to help and support neighbors, not waiting for the government to step in?
2. How is the left-hand kingdom enhanced when Christians provide aid and comfort to neighbors?
3. How is the right-hand kingdom enhanced when Christians provide aid and comfort to neighbors?

⁴ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 234.

IT'S WRONG WHEN THE "REFEREES" PLAY THE GAME!

The Christian worldview acknowledges the role of government in a person's life. It acknowledges that government has a role to play in keeping the peace, keeping things fair, making sure that everyone has equal "access" to the things that make temporal, happy, good life possible. But the "work" of doing that still belongs to the individual person seeking "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" not just for themselves, but for the one's that they love. For that, individual liberty, self-discipline, and a transcendent view of thanksgiving/thanksgiving is required for the "most liberty/freedom possible in a sinful/broken world."

The government may be the referees needed (a view often called "limited, federal government) for all the various peoples in our country to play nice, or give it their best....but when they become the "players" of the game of our lives, bad things happen to liberty, to freedom, and yes, even to the pursuit of happiness. We, all citizens created in the image of God, are to be the seekers of virtue, of justice, of success, for the sake of those we love. To lose that personal challenge and accountability is to be "taken out" of the game of our own lives. (I don't know about you, but when I played basketball, football, baseball, etc...I hated being taken out of the game – who wants to ride the bench?)

Nothing good happens when people are discouraged to live their own lives virtuously, justly, mercifully, and successfully. Nothing. So think it through....When the referee plays the game, we usually turn the game off at our home....Why? it is pleasing to no one. And, a game full of foul shots, full of penalties, and outrageous calls, is a game not worth playing or watching. Keep the government in its proper place, and get to playing the game of your life to give God glory and to bless others in His name....that's not just a life worth living, that's a neighborhood, even a country worth living in!

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the danger when the left-hand kingdom authorities become overly involved in right-hand kingdom work?
2. Is it possible for the government to pass enough laws that will create a strong, moral, caring society?
3. When is it appropriate for the Christian to work to influence legislation?

NO MORE EUPHEMISMS, DYSPHEMISMS, OR DEMONIZATIONS!

By this time, I'm sure that you are aware of the Supreme Court's action of ruling in favor of a Christian Cake Artist named Jack Phillips in the *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* case. Phillips would properly sell anything in his store to anyone who wished to buy, but he refused to create a unique cake for a wedding of a homosexual couple because it violated his conscience and his religious beliefs. Translation...The Court ruled that the homosexual couple may have the right to believe what they believe about the hotly debated issue regarding the definition of marriage, but so does the baker. But, even more importantly, the court ruled that the Colorado Civil Rights Commission could not take a hostile position against the Baker's view of marriage. In down-to-earth terms that means that people who don't believe in today's alternative views of marriage, they may indeed hold a differing position without being maligned, demonized, and litigated against. Finally, the time may be coming for forthright discussions about relationships, marriage, culture etc. without the destructive force of government muddying up the issue.

The baker in this case was indeed demonized, caricatured, and maligned as a bigot and a homophobe. Why? Because he believed in the distinctiveness of the marriage of a man and a woman as unique among all relationships and as a foundational institution for a healthy society. His view can be demonstrated sociologically, psychologically, physiologically, and yes, even theologically. Sadly, this case was about none of that, but was ultimately about shutting down his right to have his public voice about marriage and forcing him through his art to publicly acknowledge something against his conscience. The demonization of his view was part of the effort to stifle his speech and the final hammer would have been the Government's silencing of his voice by threat of law and punishment. That should frighten both sides of this cultural debate.

For many in the culture, the baker, the LCRL included, “Marriage” is more than a relationship. It is by definition, an institution. Today, this institution has been maligned, rejected, and now diminished to merely a relationship. But the West is imploding because of its disdain of marriage. Our cities are exploding because of our disregard for marriage. Our entire culture is wallowing in sexual confusion because of its diminution of marriage. At least for now, the Supreme Court said you can’t dismiss the perspective of marriage being a “unique institution among various relationships” as bigoted, homophobic, or sexist, which it is not. In fact, those of us who hold the traditional, institutional view of marriage believe that such a view can actually be beneficial to all (let those discussions/arguments begin). But, for now, one can be thankful that the State has been told that it cannot disparage such a view nor hold it in contempt with a “hostility towards religion.” That should rightfully undermine the euphemisms, the dysphemism, and the demonizations to the contrary. It’s about time.

Discussion Questions:

1. What happens to honest debate when one side resorts to name calling and broad generalizations?
2. Is it possible to have a Biblical view of marriage and not be a bigot or homophobe?
3. What happens when the government tries to legislate a person’s interpretation of the Bible?

WHY STANDING FOR LIFE MATTERS FOR US ALL

A few months ago, my daughter and I went to the Newseum here in Washington D.C. There in the museum was a remnant of the fallen Berlin Wall between that divided East Germany from West Germany, and the sobering reality of the freedoms Communism removed from its own citizens. In the museum, there were also exhibits related to the Holocaust, haunting movies of man's inhumanity to man. I remember the moderator's challenge to "look at these things intently, really look, don't turn away, so that such things might never happen again. Those are sobering words.

The challenge of those exhibits matters if we look with open eyes at the inhumanities in our own midst. With the concerns raised in the past weeks about the effects of policy on children, it should cause our country to look clearly at the enduring "child holocaust" that continues to happen in America. Thousands of children are killed each day, mostly as a matter of convenience for the sexual practices of consenting adults. Movies like "Silent Scream" and other gruesome pictures that try to demonstrate what happens in such clinics each day are summarily dismissed with calls to "look away" as if there's nothing here. With science clearly demonstrating that the fetus is a child at conception, one that can feel pain at the 20th week or even before, funding the destruction of the most helpless among us is an enduring public scandal. And then there are reports like the one attached by LIVEACTION called *Aiding Abusers – Planned Parenthood's coverup of Child Sexual Abuse, 2018* It shows that an industry which provides abortions is motivated even to abuse its patients when it affects the bottom line.

Such things matter to us all because a culture that willfully destroys the most vulnerable in its midst eventually develops a coarseness and an inhumanity that can destroy the culture itself. If civility, humaneness, and peace matter for us, we need to "look intently" at abortion anew.

In 1994, Mother Theresa spoke at the National Prayer Breakfast in our Nation's Capitol, saying,

The greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a war against the child - a direct killing of the innocent child - murder by the mother herself. And if we accept that a mother can kill her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another?... By abortion, the mother does not learn to love, but kills even her own child to solve her problems. And by abortion, the father is told that he does not have to take any responsibility at all for the child he has brought into the world.....Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching the people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want.⁵

Giving abortion a “hard look” leads us to stand for life because the sanctity of life matters for all.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the logical next steps for a government that will not protect the life of unborn children?
2. What are some alternatives to abortion for the single mother? How can these alternatives become more widely known and accepted?
3. How can the Christian minister to those involved in abortion?

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DOES EVERY DELI HAVE TO BE KOSHER?

When I was working in New York City, I must say that I not only loved the varieties of food, I loved the varieties of the people that made the city unique. Restaurants didn't just serve cuisine, they served a culture, an environment, a style all their own. I had my favorites, that's for sure. In the neighborhood there was "Pete's Place," a Greek restaurant that was to die for. Around the corner was a German restaurant that decked out their joint out in style for each season of the year. And, of course, who could compete with the delis, especially the kosher delis, in NYC. You would get up early just to get in line for a cup of coffee and a morning bagel and cream cheese toasted to perfection. This week, I thought back to those days, all those different people, each able to be themselves, open for business, open to serve....on their terms for the sake of their customers.

When I think about the diversity, the tolerance, and the service that was a normal part of the neighborhoods in the city back then, it makes me sad to see what is happening to people like Jack Phillips in Colorado today. (For more, see <https://jimdaily.focusonthefamily.com/the-state-of-colorado-is-harassing-baker-jack-phillips/>) He is under siege again. They, a kind of sexual-orientation lynch mob, are after him again. Isn't it amazing? Think about this attitude that is becoming more normal in our culture. Think about the busy-body nature of so many today. Think about their willingness to use government coercion, intimidation, even violence to silence views that have been around for thousands of years, undergirding healthy, civil, tolerant societies, views that have enabled many to be tolerant of other viewpoints different from their own. There is a new spirit among us today. Those who object to Phillip's view of sex and marriage don't just value the freedom to shop at another bakery, they must litigate, eviscerate, and destroy dissenting views to the contrary.

Here's a question that I've been asking. In a civil, tolerant society, "Aren't there other bakeries who can serve you?" Does your right to be who you are demand that others MUST agree with you? I knew I

was on to something when both Bill Maher⁶ and the Family Research Council⁷ are both asking the same question. It appears that this, as so many other lawsuits today, has nothing to do with cakes, or business, this is about silencing speech and most of the hate is coming from one direction.

So, aren't there other bakeries to bake the particular cakes of your choice? Is it a civil right's issue now to coerce someone to bake whatever you demand that they bake? Should Jack Phillips have to bake cakes to celebrate satanic or pagan rituals? Why can't he limit his services to those things that he can honor and esteem? He didn't limit any of his in-store creations to any of these customers. What right does the government have to coerce people to a certain understanding of "healthy relationships?" If Phillips won't bake a cake for a couple that's living together, will he be sued for that as well? Is living together a constitutional right? Once the constitutional protections of individuals before the law became government protections and even enforcement regarding various couples and lifestyles, the absurdities become endless.

In a country where marriage as an institution is being devalued, the last thing this culture needs is government involvement in the discussion of what a "healthy relationship is to be." Wouldn't it be better to live and let live, and to allow the faith traditions of people to be honored and held in esteem, especially those that have proven beneficial to the temporal liberties and freedoms of such a diverse culture like the America? Why does every baker have to hold your worldview? Why does every Deli have to be Kosher, or not Kosher? They don't. And in a free country, thank God they don't have to be.....at least not yet.

⁶ <https://truepundit.com/bill-maher-asks-brutal-question-cakeshop-critics-cant-answer-is-there-only-1-bakery-in-colorado/>

⁷ <http://www.frcblog.com/2017/11/why-it-unnecessary-force-jack-phillips-bake-wedding-cake/>

Discussion Questions:

1. What would happen to the economy if the Supreme Court mandated that citizens could only own one type of automobile, house, appliance, etc.?
2. When is it proper for the government to coerce all people to accept a standard for morality?
3. The Supreme Court ruled that marriage is defined a multiple number of ways, it also legalized abortion. Does that mean that a Christian must participate in alternative marriages and abortions?

REFORMATION REVELATIONS ABOUT LIBERTY AND FREEDOM!

James Madison wrote about the uniqueness of the American government and its inspiration from the Reformation in a letter to Rev. Schaeffer, Dec. 3, 1821, saying:

It illustrates the excellence of a system which, by a due distinction, to which the genius and courage of Luther led the way, between what is due to Caesar and what is due God, best promotes the discharge of both obligations. The experience of the United States is a happy disproof of the error so long rooted in the unenlightened minds of well-meaning Christians, as well as in the corrupt hearts of persecuting usurpers, that without a legal incorporation of religious and civil polity, neither could be supported. A mutual independence is found most friendly to practical Religion, to social harmony, and to political prosperity.⁸

This weekend is the celebration of the Reformation in Christian Churches around the world. The Reformation rediscovered the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a unique proclamation of Freedom, Life, and Salvation offered to sinners by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone. In order to clearly proclaim the freedom and eternal life that uniquely comes from Christ as a gift, Luther rediscovered the biblical idea that God is at work in the world in two distinct ways to preserve it and ultimately to save it. His teaching is called “Two-Kingdoms,” though it is no dualism. It is merely the idea that God’s work in the world needs to be differentiated according to His distinction. Jesus himself reminds us to “give to God what is God’s and to give to Caesar, what is Caesar’s” (Matthew 22:21). And, even then, it is to be noted that the realm of Caesar is created and directed by God according to His Law, written into the consciences of people and to be exercised in love by

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fulfilling one's God-given vocations in the world for the sake of its preservation. Luther reminds us in his explanation of the Fourth Commandment (the one that talks about Honoring Father and Mother) that in order to carry out that kind of preserving work faithfully,

*Governments must establish courts of law, punish criminals (with death if need be), wage war against invaders, sanction the legality of contracts, encourage marriage, regulate commerce, and support education; they may use such lawful means that these ends require. Governors are to perform their duties faithfully, avoid tyranny, insure the usefulness of their regime to land and people, suppress rebellion, preserve the peace, and protect the poor.*⁹

As the Western world differentiated the two freedoms, honored the two realms of public authority, and defined the extent to which they ruled over the hearts, the minds, and the bodies of people, the notion of “Caesar and his Subjects” was transformed into the reality of “The Citizens and their Elected Officials.” The Bill of Rights, as well as the rights of citizens to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness as people created in the image of God are ideals rooted in the Reformation. Living them out in ways that glorified God and served one's neighbor became foundational principles for temporal liberty in the American experiment. And, at the same time, it was to be clearly noted that as precious as these constitutional liberties were, they were not to be confused with the eternal liberties that were unique to Christ and dispensed by His Church.

Earthly liberty stems from God's preserving work in the world, exercised through family, government, work, and enterprise, even in a world hell-bent on its own demise. Eternal Freedom, however, comes only through God's restoration of it through the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ alone. That differentiation brought out the best of both for a time. On this Reformation weekend, let's rekindle our commitment to be faithful to the God who both preserves and

⁹ Large Catechism, Fourth Commandment, 167-169 (*BS*, 603; *BC*, 388; *CT*, 628, 629)

redeems this world in His ways. And let's us remind ourselves of the blessings which come from following Him in all things, now and forever.

Discussion Questions:

1. What happens when the left-hand kingdom tries to provide redemption through laws?
2. What happens when the right-hand kingdom tries to protect and defend through the Gospel?
3. What is the blessing provided by the clear distinction between left and right-hand kingdom work?

IF POLITICS CAN'T SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS, THEN WHAT WILL?

During times like Advent and Lent, those who engage the culture from a Two-Kingdom perspective¹⁰ are fully aware that human efforts, whether political, economic, philosophic, or even religious, are incapable of bringing the fulfillment in life that humans crave and even strive for. Senator Ben Sasse wrote a persuasive opinion article last month in the Wall Street Journal that described the issue in even more stark terms. It was entitled, “Politics Can’t Solve Our Political Problems.” (See the full article at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/politics-cant-solve-our-political-problems-1539364986>.) But, here’s the problem for many today: if politics can’t even solve political problems, then how can it solve the deeps divisions and problems that exist between the people groups of our culture, or people in personal relationships that matter? If politics, even faithfully practiced, is thus incapable, then what is?

Unfortunately, the first reaction to our human “incapacity” is to deny that it exists. Just do a google search on the responses to Sasse’s article. Such a search will find many critics. Some actually accuse him of being lax in his work, uncaring for those who struggle. They assert that “if he would just put his political power to work,” all the problems of poverty, crime, insecurity, and humanity’s lack of fulfillment would just go away. Such views are unfortunate. As they say, “Me thinks that they protest too much.” Even amidst the

¹⁰ Two-Kingdom cultural engagement emphasizes that God is at work in the world these two different ways: First, through the vocations of all people, believers and non, to preserve this sinful world; second, through the person and work of His Son, the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ to save the world and to proclaim that forgiveness, life, and salvation as a unique gift of faith to all who believe. God at work in two distinct ways, to preserve and to save! Believers are to seek to follow His lead then in both arenas of God’s rule.

technological, economic, and social changes of the last 100 years, one can see human depravity and brokenness throughout.

So, for those of us who are confident that Sasse is “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) about our human, political limitations, what prevents us from being pessimistically negative about these same issues? Simply this: God is at work in this world to preserve and to save! That’s the Advent message which still matters today. That’s a message that has public-cultural ramifications, as well as personal-spiritual ones. The Bible proclaims that God is at work in the world to preserve and to save. But those works are radically different. One is temporal and limited (Left-hand Kingdom rule); the other is eternal and limitless (Right-hand Kingdom rule). The first happens as God works through the vocations of even sinful people to preserve culture, to keep the peace, to keep things relatively civil and just. The second happens as He works through the perfect work of His Son, the Christmas child, to save each person in this world as a gift.

Sasse reminds us that our work, whether in politics, business, or other forms of public service, is important, but it can’t deal with the ultimate heart and soul issues that still plague us at the end of the day. He calls us to something more. His answer, “The good news is it’s fixable, but it requires friendship, it requires more attention to place and family and shared vocation and work and neighborhood and worshipping communities.”¹¹

A Two-Kingdom focus says more. It would value his list, but it would emphasize the last phrase of his answer as the most important of all. In fact, the ultimate solution is not even the actions of the “worshipping communities,” but *the actions of the One who is to be worshipped*. God’s preserving work and God’s gracious saving work in the world help us look honestly at the work we can do. They also enable us to rejoice in the work that only God can do to heal the deep brokenness in every human heart. That perspective can go a long way in dealing with the issues that are before us today like never before.

¹¹ <https://www.sarahpalin.com/2018/10/15/important-ben-sasse-reveals-1-problem-america-says-politics-can-never-solve/>

Discussion Questions:

1. In a deeply divided culture, what can the Christian do to bring about peace and reconciliation?
2. How does knowing the difference between left and right-hand kingdom work bring civility into conversations and work with neighbors?
3. What message does the Volstead Act give to those who believe that the government can legislate society to be moral?

THE SANCTITY OF LIFE AND THE INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY!

There's a disturbing trend in the European and American Western cultures. It's the virtual dissolution of the family as an institution (See Ted Malloch's, *The Tragedy of the European Family* @ <https://www.intellectualltakeout.org/article/tragedy-european-family>). While we are having discussions (or lack thereof) about relationship "fairness" for all, about no-fault divorce and serial monogamy with impunity, the actual building block of society is being ridiculed and ravaged with enormous consequences. In this month of looking at "life issues," there's none more important than the institution of the family as a unit that was meant to protect and foster life. From a biblical perspective, marriage is not only a sacred bond between a man and a woman for life (Matthew 19:6), it is a necessary foundation for a healthy society (whether people believe in its sanctity or not). When the notion of "family as an institution" erodes, there is more crime, more societal unrest, more poverty, and more vulnerability for those who need the loving protection and guidance of a father, a mother, brothers, and sisters, as well as an extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins who love them. That's more to marriage than a mere relationship; a healthy, institutional view of marriage is fundamental to a healthy society.

Here's another weighty thought: while it is true that the Bible proclaims such a view of family, it is not unusual to find this attitude about family even in cultures that do not affirm the Bible's authority. That shouldn't surprise us. The Commandment to honor one's father and mother (Exodus 20:12) is intrinsic in virtually every culture around the world because it is intrinsic to the hearts of human beings created by God (see Romans 2:14-15). Again, that's why it's disturbing to see the cultural trends undermining marriage in Western cultures, societies that at one-time honored marriage as an institution, not merely a relationship. Sadly, the most vulnerable, especially children, are the first casualties in this short-sighted re-imagining of marriage and the family.

Malloch's article identifies a disturbing undercurrent in all of this. The family dissolution is not happenstance. It is part of a movement

to empower the State in the most basic relationships of society, that of marriage and children. Just think back to the debates about marriage in the last few years where many have proffered the notion of the government's role in establishing relationship "fairness." People have spoken of the government granting civil rights to all; you know, the way that they do for a man and a woman. But that idea is completely backward from the way that the State should engage us in our relationships. The State doesn't grant us civil rights. Those are granted to us by our Creator. In fact, the State's natural impulse is to limit people's rights for its own power. That's just how power, especially political power, works in the world. So, what's the role of the State in marriage? In a proper role regarding marriage, the State would *limit its involvement* to those areas where it had a vested interest. For example, in "marriage," it limits the rights of a man and woman (i.e., makes them sign the contract called "marriage") purely due to the physiological reality that such a relationship could produce a child. And children need their parents (more than the State) to raise them, educate them, protect them, and love them. That's what is under attack today. That's the issue on the table and there are societal consequences when the State usurps its role as a defender of God-given rights and starts defining what our rights are, even defining what healthy relationships are for all.

The next time that you see issues of community violence, poverty, or illiteracy come up, ask yourself, "Why all these solutions from the State?" "Why aren't they talking about strengthening the family as an institution instead?" They should be, because when families are strong, life is valued, children are nurtured, and society is blessed. Defending traditional marriage is not merely a discussion about relationships. It's a discussion about a healthy society, one that values life in all of its vulnerabilities.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is the family the center of a productive society?
2. What happens when the government raises children?
3. How can the Christian work to defend the family unit?

NO HIGHER AUTHORITY? THE EPICENTRAL QUESTION OF THE CULTURE WAR

Robert Reich, former Labor Secretary for President Bill Clinton, said,

The true battle (of the 21st Century) will be between the modern society and the anti-modernists; between those who believe in the primacy of the individual and those who believe that human beings owe their allegiance and identity to a higher authority; between those who give priority to life in this world and those who believe that human life is a mere preparation for existence beyond life; between those who believe in science, reason, and logic and those who believe that truth is revealed through Scripture and religious dogma; Terrorism will disrupt and destroy lives. But, it is not the greatest danger that we face.”¹²

From where I stand, those appear quite clearly to be fighting words, right? It would seem that Mr. Reich has drawn a line in the sand, defining an “us versus them” reality. He even maligns those who disagree with him, calling them “anti-modernists,” whatever that means. By the way, I realize that he believes wholeheartedly in what he is saying. But any time you label your ideological components as “anti” your view, that’s not a debate or a dialogue; “them’s fighting words!”

So, as Christians, why fight? Or should I ask, “Why fight back?” Why battle? Isn’t this a “turn the other cheek moment” which may be necessary for sharing the Gospel? Isn’t our humility our greatest asset in these debates? Yes, and no. It is true that our proclamation of the truth is from the position of humility, not arrogance. It is true that our sharing of the faith is willing to endure all kinds of false caricatures and abuse. But, when it comes to the moral and ethical fundamentals of the society in which one lives, one should never abandon the battle for what that actually truth is. When Reich speaks of those who owe their identity and allegiance to some higher authority, he is not just

¹² Ramesh Ponnuru, “Robert Reich’s Religion Problem,” *National Review Online*, July 6, 2004

demeaning Christianity, but all who see the very moral structure of the world as a gift of God. While Christians proclaim a unique message of salvation compared to other religious traditions, we share a common moral view of the universe, a common view of the dignity and brokenness of humanity rooted in an authority greater than ourselves. One could argue that such a view of humanity helped birth some of the greatest documents of freedom ever produced, the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.

There is a “battle” going on in our culture. We may not have started it, but it is clearly directed at us. It is being waged against the biblical proclamation of the truth. I believe that Mr. Reich stated it plainly. The battle is being brought to anyone who does not adhere to secular, naturalistic, mechanistic, non-theistic values. He calls all that “modern,” even progressive, no matter how regressive and destructive it is in reality. In stark contrast to that, there are those of us who see the authority of the God of creation, and the awe and wonder of His ordering of the world as a blessing for humanity; we also see the proper use of reason, science, and logic within a moral framework as God-given blessings to be used wisely. But we also see Reich’s view as anything but progressive. It is rather regressive, sectarian, and destructive to those things that hold us together as human beings who have been “created in the image of God”¹³ for a purposeful life here and now, as well as an eternal life, forever.

Discussion Questions:

1. What issues are Christians fundamentally against?
2. Can a Christian be a Scientist? Politician? Business owner?
3. How does the Christian hold society together?

¹³ Those of us who are Christian would add that God’s love even compelled Him to redeem us as well. But, for our temporal, common dignity, freedom, and civility, it is sufficient to acknowledge our allegiance to the higher authority who created us as His own.

STOP LITIGATING CULTURAL, MORAL DIFFERENCES, PLEASE!

One of the main efforts of our Lutheran Center For Religious Liberty's work in Washington D.C. is to partner with various, like-minded organizations to roll back the weaponization of politics today, especially as it concerns valid differences of opinion as to how we are to live our lives faithfully and morally. There are legitimate differences of opinion in our culture today as to what healthy relationships are, what healthy sexuality entails, and the definition and purpose of marriage as a relationship and as an institution within a healthy society. Sadly, it's not merely that such disagreements are more prevalent. Today disagreements are increasingly not allowed and the strong-arm of the State is being used to silence those who disagree with the prevailing accepted notions in popular culture. Bakers are losing their businesses, educational institutions are being threatened, and hard-working, honorable people are losing their jobs as well. A case in point is Georgia's persecution of a faithful Fire Chief named Kelvin Cochran (For a more detailed account, see <https://www.theglobaldispatch.com/city-of-atlanta-to-pay-kelvin-cochran-for-unconstitutional-firing-67553/>).

Cochran was a dedicated and decorated city employee who suddenly came under fire because of a devotional book that he had written on his free-time, and not at work. It briefly described his Christian views on sex and marriage—views that are very traditional and mainstream. He was immediately suspended for 30 days, directed to attend “sensitivity training,” and then summarily fired even though a thorough investigation showed that Cochran was a very good leader and had never discriminated against anyone. His crime? He had a different view of the purpose of sex and the institution marriage and family as compared to the libertine views of the “thought police” in our society today. For that he was to be punished and quite severely.

Our plea? Stop litigating cultural, moral differences, please! Think for a moment about the widespread destruction of marriage today and the ensuing chaos in our neighborhoods with the STD's, the broken relationships, and the growing callousness between men and women emanating from the sexual revolution (devolution?) of the 1960s. In

light of all of that one would think that Cochran's call to men to return to chastity, committed love, and family would be welcomed as the benevolent solution that it is. Instead, we are criminalizing viewpoints that once were rightly considered mainstream and just.

The LCRL's position on many of these cultural issues is to protect them as issues involving freedom of speech and freedom of religion, defending our dissenting voice in a culture that should value such a dialogue. Such issues should be engaged via dialogues of persuasion and not by the politics of coercion. Thankfully, the courts sided with Cochran and ruled that the city of Atlanta had indeed violated the chief's first amendment rights. The courts determined that Atlanta's rules restricting non-work speech, like the book for Christian men that Cochran wrote, were too broad and allowed city officials to unconstitutionally discriminate against views with which they disagree. But it should give us pause that such rules are being written in cities around the country. As a result, merely holding a biblical view of marriage and family is now considered a legitimate cause for one's termination, no matter how well a person does his or her job. The work of protecting a Christian's and the Church's right to have a public voice in our culture prayerfully goes on.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the danger to society when only one view is tolerated and people holding opposing views are persecuted?
2. What is the danger of local legislation that makes holding Christian views illegal?
3. How will constant, prolonged litigation become a deterrent to standing up against punitive legislature?

IN THE WORLD, NOT OF THE WORLD, YET FOR THE WORLD

Jesus said some very clear things about how things are. One thing that He said very clearly, “My Kingdom is not of this world.” Yet there He was, in the flesh, in the world to save the world. Jesus’s own ministry among us reveals the truth that Christians are to be in the world, not of the world, for the world. Or, as we like to say here at the LCRL, “We are to strive for excellence in all we do, to give God glory and to serve our neighbor in HIS name.”

Our mission is defined by the one who is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. St. Paul tells us to “have His Mindset in us (Ph. 2).” That mindset did not seek to use His stature or His status for His own gain, but to use all that was at His disposal to save those who could not save themselves. That’s why He is the only Lord and Savior. That’s why His actions ALONE can redeem and save the world.

So, we are not the saviors of the world, far from it. But, we can be servants of the Savior who engage the world for His sake. And, the Scripture tells us just how that is to be done. God preserves the world through the Law, through vocations that are called to execute justice on His terms. And God sends His Saving, Word in the flesh, Jesus the Christ to bring life and salvation to all as a gift of grace.

With that in mind, we take up our mission to be part of God’s preserving work, proclaiming His authority to create and to order the world, calling people to civic righteousness at the least, and heartfelt repentance by God’s Spirit. Like others, we are IN the world. But, as people moved to repentance and faith, we are of Christ, so not OF the world. As such we are called to live as He would have us live. To be faithful in our vocations, yes, but to be obedient to Him most of all. And Finally, as His people, not of the world, yet in the world, we are to be for the world, serving our neighbors, our friends, even our enemies by speaking His truth, the truth in Love, calling all people to life and salvation in His name forever! In, not of, but for the world.... what a way to live!

Discussion Questions:

1. What comfort do we have from being IN the world and not OF the world?
2. What are some practical things we can do FOR the world?
3. Why is it important to serve those who hate us?