



PART TWO: BUILDING FOR THE KINGDOM, NOT THE KINGDOMS

By Pastor David Fields

Mark 12:13-17; Revelation 5:9-10; John 18:36

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:33

I. Jesus and the Kingdom of God

The Creator God intends His good world to be run by obedient humans; and that they would do so in wise and just ways (Gen 1:26ff.).

Yet, by Genesis 3 the humans reject God's ways. They seek to be an authority unto themselves, rebelling against God. All of this leads to the unravelling of God's peace and order, and chaos sets in.

Yet, where Adam and Eve stood before the tree and disobeyed God, Jesus will stand before another ‘tree,’ a roman cross, and was “...obedient to death, even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:8), as Paul puts it.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus sends His followers to go and make disciples of all nations. The story of Scripture demonstrates that God's Kingdom includes 'the nations' but can never be reduced so that our focus is just on one nation.

As we read in Revelation 5:

“[Jesus, the “Lamb of God”] you were slain and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth.”

Revelation 5:9b-10

God is restoring what He always intended. People from every tribe, and language, and people and nation – to form a multi-ethnic, multi-national and diverse body of believers that pledge allegiance to a country without borders.

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

John 18:36

Not 'of this world' - Its origin is not out of the kind of political system that the world produces - one that uses violence and coercion. Yet Jesus' kingdom is very much for this world - for its healing and restoration.

NOTES

[illegible]

NOTES

Jesus' words continue to critique all those ways the church and empire have been wrapped in the same flag; and Christianity became a tool to sanction expansionist visions and worldly might - to justify the Crusades, or the forced conversions of whole people groups during colonial periods. This is not the Jesus-way. Period.

For us, there is a word of caution about any way that a political movement that might try to co-opt the name of Christ, treat believers like a 'voting bloc' and use Christianity to give some sort of 'divine sanction' to build earthly kingdoms. **Kingdom Orientation One: We aren't building the 'kingdoms;' we're building for the Kingdom of God.**

In recent years some Christian leaders have used our text, "*Give to Caesar what is Caesar and to God what is God's*" to suggest that in matters relating to spirituality - we act Christianly, but the political sphere can operate as a fierce free-for-all.

As Kaitlyn Schiess has pointed out in her excellent book *The Ballot and the Bible*:

"Christian leaders used it [the phrase "Give to Caesar what is Caesars"] to...separate a person's interpersonal moral obligations and their public political obligations....Give to Caesar what is Caesar's meant playing by the rules of the world when it came to politics, and giving to God what is God meant acting faithfully in your church, family, immediate community."¹

II. The Challenge of Relating Faithfully to the State: A Crash-Course in Church History

A. Early Church

After Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension back to the Father, you have the early church, empowered by the Spirit, sent on mission. They have their directions from Jesus, to take the Good News of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

The early church is both integrated into their societies, but also living in an alternative way - a kind of alternate community that acts as a sign and foretaste of the kingdom (see Note in Endnote 2).

For nearly the next 300 years, the Christian movement spread throughout the Mediterranean world, primarily as Christians did their work with excellence, and sought the good of the cities God had planted them in.

Jesus, Caesar, and the Kingdom of God

Part Two: Building for the Kingdom, not the Kingdoms

They are reported as moving toward the sick and infirm, of caring for babies that were discarded - raising them as their own. It was common for Christians to raise funds to buy slaves - as slavery was the backbone of the economic engine of the Roman Empire - only so they could turn around and set them free. One second century document urges Christians: "Instead of fields buy souls in trouble, as each of you is able."³

This is a powerful reminder for us today. **Kingdom Orientation Two: The church does not need to be in a place of ‘political power’ to be ‘salt and light’ in the world.**

B. Christendom

Into the story enter Emperor Constantine. Here the 'Caesar' himself has a dramatic vision, believing that Christ helped him win a military victory in 312 AD.

In the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, the church is granted official legal status as a religion, and the brutal state-sponsored persecution against them ends.

Now a much more complicated relationship between the church and state begins to form. Over the following decades, Christianity will become the official religion of the Roman empire - which creates the kind of peace that means Christians can develop many social programs without fear - like the first ever hospital system.

On the flip side, that marriage of church and state always brings with it the challenge that comes with how power corrupts. N.T. Wright and Michael Bird note:

“At its worst, the Church then becomes an instrument of empire, offering Christ’s insignia to the decrees of soldier-emperors who continued to do what empires always do: conquer, enslave, and exploit. The Church came to exchange the cross of Christ for the sword of Rome.”⁴

Before we think that only evil comes of this period, many of the major good societal shifts come during this time. This is a time when Christian leaders could have major influence on western culture. The Roman world worshiped power, strength and dominance.

Here's how political philosopher Nassim Nicholas Taleb describes the shifts:

“The Greco-Romans despised the feeble, the poor, the sick, and the disabled; Christianity glorified the weak, the downtrodden, and the untouchables; and does that all the way to the top of pecking order.”⁵ PA

NOTES

NOTES

Most people in today's world recognize the idea that all people have equal value and dignity and should be treated with basic human rights - that it's better to suffer evil than inflict it. We might think of these as self-evident. They are not self-evident - not to the Greeks or Romans, the Vikings, or the Ottomans, not to Mongols or the Aztec - not at all.

These are rooted in the distinct Christian story that all people are made in the image of God - that God loved the world enough to enter His creation, associate with the lowly and die a violent death in order to save, heal and transform us. This proves that power is found in weakness, greatness is attained in service, that revenge only begets more evil and that victims will be vindicated by God.

This period see both these societal goods on one hand, and many abuses of power, and many evils done in the name of Jesus on the other.

C. Reformation

By the mid-1400's there were already major shifts beginning - challenges to the way that the Roman Catholic Church was operating. This period is known as the Reformation, which really comes to a head when Martin Luther, in 1517, nails his "95 Thesis" - these areas he wanted to 'reform' in the church - to the door of the Wittenberg chapel. The following decades saw several divergent streams that this Reformation took.

i. Anabaptists

One of these called the 'Radical Reformation' would become known as the 'Anabaptists,' which was a slur meaning 'Anti-Baptists,' for they stopped baptizing infants, believing that the church was made up of those who came to trust in Jesus. This begins with Menno Simons, a monk whose reformations of the church were the beginning of the Mennonite tradition.

In very basic terms, their answer to the question of relating to government was, 'We, as the church, are our own society - an alternate community under God's reign.' There is a whole-hearted, no-compromise mindset on things like violence which would seem necessary if they were to engage with the political sphere. This is why some Mennonite communities, and most Amish and Hutterite communities, in Canada live completely separate from the rest of society.

ii. Baptists

NOTES

The early Baptist movement, of which we are a part, shares a few of these same impulses. There were two young men, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, studying theology and biblical studies at Cambridge University in England in the late 1500's.

In England at the time, the head of the church was the monarch. Henry VIII shifted the authority of the church from the Pope to himself, the King; thus, the church and the political sphere were deeply interrelated. We could almost say a 'completely overlapping' world.

John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, in their reading of the Bible, saw some serious issues with this state-run church. On their reading, they came to believe in freedom of conscious or sometimes called 'Soul Liberty.' This has two major aspects to it which have implications for how they came to relate to the state.

D. Soul Liberty

i. Competency of The Soul

This essentially means that each person is responsible to God and is capable to make a decision about faith in Jesus. No one can claim 'Christian faith' as simply an inheritance from their family or nation. You'll have to respond personally to follow Him, or not to. To trust him, or not to.

This means that the state can't compel anyone to become a Christian - no forced conversions. There is no 'coercion' in true Christian faith. Here's what John Smyth wrote on the topic in 1612:

"That the magistrate [governing officials] is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to for and compel men [and he means "and women" in each case here] to this or that form of religion, or doctrine; but to leave Christian religion free, to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions and injuries and wrongs of men against man."⁶

God makes us free, and we need to allow every person a sense of 'freedom of conscious' in religious matters. Notice too that there is a place for the state, and that is to 'handle only civil transgressions' - like, to enact laws that govern a society.

ii. Freedom of Religion and the Separation of Church and State

NOTES

The church should be free to be faithful to Jesus apart from the agenda of the state. The church should not become a tool of the state.

These early Baptists believed that they were called to be engaged in their society and submissive to the state, except in terms of religious matters. So yes, 'Caesar' – the governing authorities – have a God-given role, for the flourishing of a society, but there are limits.

The belief in 'religious freedom' – means freedom for *all* religious groups.

That doesn't mean Baptists are 'anti-state.' It means they are 'anti-state-church.' This protects that state from 'running its agenda' through the church and *vice versa*.

Baptists still want to see the government make ethical and moral decisions based on a biblical understanding of what's good, true and right for a society. They fiercely defend religious freedom. However, they would never expect the government to mandate Kingdom principles and expect everyone to live by them; and they would often remind the government that it answers to God.

While they would be happy to live in a country that was made up of many Christians, they have no interest in declaring a nation a 'Christian country' or 'nation' if the people don't believe as they do.

Summary:

1. The 'Christendom Space,' where the state and the church are deeply intertwined might lead to some Christian influence in laws and morality; but it creates a situation where the church can more easily be compromised by power and unable to speak with integrity and prophetically.
2. The 'Alternate Society Space' of an Anabaptist approach maintains the ability for the church to be utterly distinct from the kingdoms of this world, and to have a more 'prophetic' kind of witness to the human powers. The challenge is that it may have a more limited ability to influence society as 'salt and light' – for the good of society.

NOTES

ENDNOTES

NOTES

1. Schiess, Kaitlyn. (22 Aug 2023). The Ballot and the Bible: How Scripture Has Been Used and Abused in American Politics and Where We Go From Here. Brazos Press.
2. Note: The early church was functioning under very different political circumstances than we are. They are living under the oppressive reign of Rome, and the early church would never have imagined a situation of living in a modern liberal democracy like ours. So, there are no direct, one-to-one correlations from their political situation to ours. And it's why there have been divergent ways that the church has sought to answer the question of how to "Give to Caesar what is Caesars, and to God what is God's." Which is why the story of the Church develops in divergent ways.
3. "The Shepherd of Hermas," Apostolic Fathers, trans. J.B. Lightfoot and ed. J.R. Harner (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House Books, 1967.), Wesley Center Online, – Shepherd of Hermas (2nd C) see reference in Diana Lesperance: How the Early Christian Church Rid the Ancient World of Slavery (June 14, 2013) at: <https://thefaithfulchurch.com/2013/06/14/how-the-early-christian-church-rid-the-ancient-world-of-slavery/#:~:text=Perpetua%20and%20Felicity%20would%20face,is%20able.%E2%80%9D%20%5B7%5D> (accessed Feb 13, 2026)
4. Wright, N.T. & Bird, Michael F. (26 Mar 2024). Jesus and the Powers: Christian Political Witness in an Age of Totalitarian Terror and Dysfunctional Democracies. Zondervan.
5. Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. (26 Aug 2022). "On Christianity: An essay as a foreword for Tom Holland's Dominion," Incerto. <https://medium.com/incerto/on-christianity-b7fecde866ec> (accessed Feb 13, 2026).
6. Smyth, John. (1612). "Differences of the Churches of the Separation." see: <https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/browse?type=lcsupc&key=Smyth%2C%20John%2C%20d%2E%201612%20%2D%2D%20Differences%20of%20the%20churches%20of%20the%20separation&c=x>



Open Up

What have you found most helpful or encouraging so far about the current series?

What questions are still outstanding for you? (Consider writing some of these down and sending them to Pastor Dave)

Dig In

1. **Read Ephesians 6:10-20.** How does knowing that our 'battle is not against flesh and blood' inform how we might approach the challenges we see in our world? How are we told to respond in this text?
2. In the message, one implication of this text was to say: We don't 'demonize' the 'other-side' – whoever the other side happens to be. We always recognize the humanity, the image of God, in others, even in those we disagree with most.
 - a. How does seeing the image of God in every person challenge dehumanizing rhetoric, policies or actions?
 - b. Who are the neighbours most easily forgotten or reduced to stereotypes today?
 - c. How does recognizing the image of God in others shape civil discourse, especially with those we disagree with?
3. From a Baptist take, the message presented the idea that: 'We, as a church seek to win hearts through the gospel, which will lead to transformation that is not imposed or coercive. We are not 'fighting' a battle against people, but serving with influence toward the good, the true and the beautiful. We are aiming to win hearts to the true King of the kingdom of God, not trying to create a quote-unquote, 'Christian nation.' We are building for God's Kingdom, not the kingdoms of this world.'

This approach seeks to maintain religious freedom for every religious group, not just our own.

Discuss this approach.

- a. What do you think about it?
- b. What might it look like for you to step deeper into missional engagement that seeks to show the beauty of the Gospel in your own neighbourhood.

Prayer: Pray for any needs in your group. Take time for concerted prayer for our political leaders, recognizing that our struggle is not against persons but against spiritual powers and principalities. Pray for our mayor and council, for our Provincial MLAs and for our MPs and Federal government.