

# Why Empires Fall

*Kerby Anderson looks at six insightful books and videos exploring alarming parallels between the U.S. and failed empires of history.*

## Collapse of Empires

If you study world history, you realize that empires come and go. In this article I want to look at what has happened to some of the major empires because we can also learn about what is happening today in our country. I will be quoting from recent books that have documented the decline and fall of empires.

First, I will merely quote from a recent YouTube video [\[1\]](#) that describes a pattern in history that has destroyed three global superpowers in the last 500 years: Spain, Britain, and the Soviet Union. Today, the U.S. is following a similar pattern.



In 1590, Spain was the richest empire on earth. Spain controlled half the world's gold and silver. Spain's military dominated Europe. Their currency was accepted everywhere. Yet within 80 years, the Spanish government was bankrupt.

The Spanish coin that was supposed to be pure silver became 50% copper, then 75% copper. By 1600 Spanish coin contained barely any silver. Inflation exploded. Spain went into a debt spiral and borrowed constantly. Manufacturing declined. Agriculture stagnated.

In 1914, Britain ruled the largest empire in human history. At the time, it was said that the sun never set on British empire. Britain controlled 25% of the land surface. The pound sterling was the global reserve currency. Yet within 40 years, the empire was gone. The currency collapsed.

Britain had too many military commitments around the world. They won World War I, but at a terrible cost. By 1931, Britain had to abandon the gold standard. The pound lost 25% of its value overnight.

In 1991, the Soviet Union still seemed dominant. It was another superpower. It had nuclear weapons, global influence, and satellites spanning the globe. Yet the Soviet Union ceased to exist 900 days later due to economic implosion.

The idea that nations follow a pattern as they collapse isn't new. Decades ago, I did a week of radio programs on "[The Decline of a Nation.](#)" A decade later, I did another week on "[When Nations Die](#)" because of a book that was published with that title.

What is new is how this video explains the seven stages of collapse and applies them to previous empires. But the key point of the video is the reality that America has already completed five of the seven stages. We aren't approaching the pattern but are within it.

As I often suggest, we can resolve some of these issues, but the first step is to admit that we are following this pattern of collapse. Below we will be looking at some of the reasons other empires fell and connect it to what is happening in our world today.

## End of Everything

Now we will look at the book by Victor Davis Hanson, *The End of Everything: How Wars Descend into Annihilation.* [{2}](#)

In his book he provides four historical examples: the city-state of Thebes, ancient Carthage, Byzantine Constantinople, and the Aztec Empire. The leaders believed their illustrious pasts would be enough to prevent their destruction. Alexander the Great, Roman Scipio, Muslim Mehmet, and the Spanish conquistador Cortés proved them wrong.

He explains that the leveling of Thebes by Alexander the Great, the erasure of Carthage by Scipio, the conquest and transformation of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmet, and the obliteration of the Aztecs all marked the end of cultures and civilizations.

Alexander, for example, brought an end to classical Greece. The fall of Constantinople marked the end of the Mediterranean world as the nexus of European commerce. And the largest Christian cathedral in the West became the greatest mosque in the Islamic world.

The book is a warning to us today, but I also realize that few people will read his book. That is why I would encourage you to watch his five-minute video summary produced by Hillsdale College.[{3}](#)

He says his book “is about the existential destruction of the losing side in a war. This is very rare in history. It doesn’t happen very often. But when it does, it should enlighten us how it does why it does, and can it happen again?”

He explains that he wrote his book “not just as a historical journey to document the rare cases of a targeted nation being completely destroyed, but as a warning that human nature doesn’t change.” We naively assumed that globalization would create a common humanity and bring an end to global conflict. Instead, he “noticed that there were more and more existential threats coming from autocratic regimes.”

He reminds us that the same mentalities and delusions that doomed the Thebans, Carthaginians, the Byzantines, and the Aztecs are still with us today. Even as they were about to be slaughtered, some may still have been thinking, “It cannot happen here.”

He wants us to be aware that what happened in the past could happen in the future. We need to learn from the past and protect ourselves in the future. This is a sobering call for

contemporary readers to heed the lessons of obliteration, lest we blunder into catastrophe once again. He reminds us that the world needs a strong America so that we can prevent “the end of everything.”

## Peak Human

Let's now turn to examine the book *Peak Human*, [{4}](#) written by historian Johan Norberg.

His book explains what we can learn from the rise and fall of “golden ages.” He describes seven of humanity’s greatest civilizations from ancient Athens and the Roman Republic to Renaissance Italy, the Dutch Republic, and today’s Anglosphere.

Each had their golden age and contributed to our world today. Ancient Greece gave us democracy and the rule of law. From the Muslim world came algebra and modern medicine. The Dutch Republic gave us economic ideas and some of the greatest artistic movements.

He explained that he picked these civilizations because each of them exemplifies what can be described as a golden age. This was a period of innovations that revolutionized many fields and sectors in a short period of time. The characteristics are cultural creativity, scientific discoveries, technological achievements, and economic growth.

He laments that human history is a long list of deprivations and horrors. But it is also the source of the knowledge, institutions, and technologies that have set most of humanity free from such horrors. It requires raw material, but the citizens needed to be free to experiment and innovate, without being subject to feudal lords, centralized governments, or raving armies.

In a recent interview with John Stossel [{5}](#), he talked about how Rome inspired our form of government, a republic with a

system of checks and balances. “There is a reason why we have a Senate, and they meet in the Capitol,” Norberg explained. “We borrow these ideas from the Romans.”

Of course, these empires fell. “The emperors wanted to become popular by handing out free stuff to people. Originally, this started small. You just handed the very poor means of subsistence. But it was popular, so the group that lived on the public’s expense grew larger all the time.”

Eventually the ever-expanding system of entitlements became too much. Norberg observed, “Romans could conquer the world, but they couldn’t do entitlement reform.” To pay for this, the Roman emperors devalued their currency by putting less gold and silver in each coin. He concluded that, “Inflation was much worse than barbarian invaders.”

This sounds like our world today. Modern governments, including our own, make more financial promises than they can keep. To pay for it, they print more money. We have been living in a golden age, but the question before us today is whether it will continue.

## Loss of Moral Values

In this section we will look at an essay by Allen Mashburn who reminds us that “Societies That Surrender Moral Foundation Historically Self-Destruct.”[{6}](#)

This is not a new idea. Decades ago, I did a week of radio programs on “[The Decline of a Nation](#).” A decade later, I did another week on “[When Nations Die](#)” because of a book that was published with that title. And more recently I even did [a week of programs](#) based on a book that compared America to Rome.

The reason for Mashburn’s article were several events that took place during Pride Month. He “never envisioned a day where transvestites would lecture us on human biology, or sterilizers would pose as health professionals advocating for

human rights. It seems that our nation has descended into a state of utter madness, where men can now claim pregnancy and the number of genders rivals the alphabet."

Those issues are just a few of the many legitimate concerns which point to the well-documented decline and fall of other civilizations. Greece tolerated and even celebrated immoral behavior. And "the decline of the Roman Empire can be attributed to the abandonment of strong familial bonds and moral values in favor of weakness and laxity." He observes that the similarity between Rome and America is alarming.

Of course, the pattern we recognize in Greece and Rome can be seen in other civilizations in the past. That would include the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and even the nation of Israel. In Isaiah 5:20 we read that God pronounced judgment on Israel. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."

Of course, there is another side of this equation. Mashburn reminds us that "whenever a nation upholds high moral standards, it reaches the pinnacle of success." Yes, it is true that nations decline when they lose a moral foundation for society. But they also flourish when it upholds morality and integrity while also supporting and encouraging strong families.

He also quotes from the book, *Christians in the Wake of the Sexual Revolution*, by Randy Alcorn. He warns that unless our country experiences spiritual repentance and undergoes a profound reversal of moral values, we risk inviting the same judgment that befell Sodom and Gomorrah.

That is why Christians should devote themselves to daily prayers for our nation's spiritual and moral well-being. The only way to reverse this downward moral spiral is for a spiritual revival and spiritual repentance in this country.

# America's Expiration Date

Finally, we will look at a book by Cal Thomas, *America's Expiration Date*.<sup>[\[7\]](#)</sup>

He asks, what is America's future? The book came out years ago but has a new preface and is more relevant today. [He was on my radio program](#) to talk about the fall of empires and the future of the United States.

He begins with an observation by Sir John Glubb, who wrote *The Fate of Empires and the Search for Survival*. He noticed an interesting historical fact. The average age of a nation or empire's greatness is only 250 years. Most nations lose their way in a relatively short amount of time.

Using that ruler, Cal Thomas gives us a history lesson of the Persian Empire, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Arab Empire, the Spanish Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire, and the Russian Empire. He concludes with the United States.

Each empire fell for different reasons, but they are lessons to us today. Sometimes they fell because they became too prosperous and thus too apathetic. Sometimes they fell because the empire was over extended. Most had a period of decadence and decline. The Spanish empire was so riven with conflict, they were never invaded because other countries saw nothing worth conquering.

Persia's decline was due to class struggle. The common people, who were not part of the upper class, began organizing riots and revolts. Kings became greedy and started stealing from the nation's wealth rather than sharing the wealth with the people. The social structure collapsed.

As we have discussed above, Rome's fall was gradual. The familiar saying, "Rome wasn't built in a day." Neither was it destroyed in a day. As the Roman empire grew, more money

needed to be provided to the military. The empire's infrastructure suffered. And the common people suffered because the ruling class cared more about what was on the next horizon than what was at home.

He does believe that there is still time to resurrect the republic, but the answer can't be found in politicians. Our future doesn't depend on the White House, but instead is dependent on what we do in our house.

Cal Thomas ends his book with valuable suggestions. First, set standards of decency and morality for your yourself and your family. Reevaluate the education of your children. Don't send them to schools or universities that have largely become propaganda centers for secular progressives. Gather with other believers to worship, celebrate, and to encourage one another. Daily obey the call to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19), often witnessing with words and actions.

### Notes

1. The 7-Stage Collapse Pattern, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb39CeKyWg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb39CeKyWg).
2. Victor Davis Hanson, *The End of Everything: How Wars Descend into Annihilation*, NY: Basic Books, 2024.
3. Victor Davis Hanson, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8c0EuIUTTw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8c0EuIUTTw).
4. Johan Norberg, *Peak Human*, London: Atlantic Books, 2025.
5. John Stossel, *Golden Ages*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=opHnY8tjzug](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opHnY8tjzug)
6. Allen Mashburn, "Societies That Surrender Moral Foundation Historically Self-Destruct," [amgreatness.com/2023/07/06/societies-that-surrender-moral-foundation-historically-self-destruct/](https://amgreatness.com/2023/07/06/societies-that-surrender-moral-foundation-historically-self-destruct/).
7. Cal Thomas, *America's Expiration Date*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020.

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# Stop Worrying About the 2024 Election!

It is Election Season, the great American pastime second only in importance to the Super Bowl, where we all gather as one people to decide how the government will exploit us this time! Get ready to break up friendships, argue with family members, and dehumanize anyone who does not vote for your candidate! All jokes aside, the presidential election is a stressful event, especially in 2024, since our political climate is extremely polarized. How are we as Christians and Americans to approach our own electoral process?

While not all of the founding fathers were Christians, “Jefferson and other secular minded Americans subscribed to certain propositions about law and authority that had the roots in the Protestant reformation,”<sup>[1]</sup> so they all held Christian values. The fundamental Christian teaching our government is founded upon is that humans are made in the image of God. The Declaration of Independence asserts, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights. . .”

The limitation of powers was also influenced by Christian teachings on human nature, that we are a fallen creation. Humans, while made in the image of God, are inherently corrupted by sin. All systems of government can and will be used for the ruler’s benefit at the expense of their subjects. The U.S. government was set up to keep too much power from falling into anybody’s hands, including the masses.

As citizens, Christians have been given a number of responsibilities. We are commanded to obey and render service

to our government. "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." (Matthew 22:21) Because it is a God-ordained institution, we are to submit to civil authority (1 Peter 2:13-17).<sup>{2}</sup> One service you may render as an American citizen is participating in the law-making process and executive processes by voting.

The campaigners seek to present themselves as God's gift to the United States, while portraying their opponents and any who vote for them as the devil himself. It is your responsibility to discern truth from lies. We have no right to treat those who vote differently than us as less than human. All are made in the image of God, so all deserve to be respected as such. Do not throw around labels meant to dehumanize the other side like "anti-life" or "Nazi," as these achieve nothing but further enmity between our countrymen. Instead, do everything you can to debate with respect by attacking their position rather than the person.

Finally, in Luke 12 Jesus tells us that God can and will provide for our needs, so we should not worry about things outside of our control. Too often, I have seen people worrying over how other people in their city vote, or respond with anger when their electoral vote overturned the popular vote. This is unfortunate.

"But this is injustice!" some might say. On the contrary, letting the popular vote decide our elections is unjust, because it gives all of the power to big cities. People living in rural areas will have no say in elections, because the city always out-votes them. We have no control over how other people vote. Our electors are meant to take power away from the popular vote.<sup>{3}</sup> Why should you be mad? Once you have voted, it's out of your hands. God is in control of the rest.

## Notes

1. Anderson, Kerby. *Christians and Government: A Biblical Point of View* (Cambridge Ohio: Christian Publishing House,

2016), 20.

2. *Ibid.*, 7.

3. National Archives and Records Administration. (n.d.). Electoral College History. National Archives and Records Administration. [www.archives.gov/electoral-college/history](http://www.archives.gov/electoral-college/history)

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## The Importance of Voting

*Kerby Anderson provides reasons why it's so important for people of faith to exercise our stewardship of voting in what is probably the most consequential election in our lifetime.*

This election season is like no other in recent memory. This was the first time in more than a century that two presidential candidates, who have served in that office, were running against each other. Now we have a previous president and vice-president running. This is similar to 1984 when President Reagan ran against the previous Vice-President in Jimmy Carter's administration (Walter Mondale).

Voters can compare four years of a Trump administration with three-and-half years of a Biden/ Harris administration. Of course, they can also compare a Republican-controlled Senate with a Democratic-controlled Senate. And they can do the same for the House of Representatives.

You can also compare the National Democratic Platform with the National Republican Platform. Here are links to both:

[Democratic](#)

[Republican](#)

The differences are stark and illustrate why so many people say this is the most consequential election in our lifetimes.

Who we elect to office will determine our laws and our taxes. Judges that are appointed and confirmed will affect life, liberty, and property.

As Christians we need to consider what role we will play in the next election. We have a civic responsibility because we are both citizens of heaven and citizens of earth. To assess our involvement, let's look at a few issues.

## **Close Elections**

We have had many close elections for federal office. For example, we have had close presidential elections in 1960, 1976, 2000, 2004, 2016, and 2020. The last two presidential elections illustrate this when we examine the vote totals in the six swing states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin).

In 2016, Donald Trump won three of those swing states (Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) by a mere 77,744 votes. In 2020, Joe Biden won three swing states (Arizona, Georgia, and Michigan) by 42,844 votes.

While we can have a debate about whether Joe Biden really won those states fairly, my point is to illustrate how close even the presidential elections have been. Change 42,844 votes in three states and we would have had a 269-269 electoral college tie.

We can also point to very close elections for federal, state, and local offices. The key point is we have close elections, and that's why all Christians should be registered to vote and then go out and cast their ballot.

## **Importance of the Christian Vote**

Various polls suggest that religious voters could sway the race between Vice President Harris and former President Donald Trump. One CBN report documented that "President Biden is

trailing Donald Trump among voters who regularly attend religious services, a phenomenon extending beyond the traditional support base of evangelical Christians.” Senator Josh Hawley put it this way: “There’s no majority for the Republican party without voters of faith. And they’re going to decide this election. So we need to turn out.”

Former member of Congress and former presidential candidate, Tulsi Gabbard explains that the Democratic Party “is trying to erase God from every facet of our public life.” She also added that “Now more than ever, people of faith, people of spirituality, need to stand up, to defend this fundamental, God-given right and stop those who are trying to take it away from us.”

## **Stewardship of the Vote**

Have Christians been a good steward of the vote? Over the years, I have provided statistics about how born-again Christians have done in previous elections. The percentages are relatively consistent. Approximately 85 percent of Christians of voting age are registered to vote. That means about 15 percent are not even registered to vote. Of those Christians registered to vote, about 65 percent actually vote.

In the New Testament, Jesus says that believers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). We have a stewardship responsibility when it comes to using our gifts, talents, and opportunities. Jesus also described the importance of this stewardship in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). He was critical of the one servant who buried his talent (Matthew 25:26). We as voters should not “bury our talent” but use the opportunity God has given us to vote responsibly.

## **Educating Voters**

Having accurate information is vital and can change an

election. Unfortunately, [media bias](#) often prevents voters from knowing important information. A month after the 2020 election, the Media Research Center asked The Polling Company to survey 1,750 Biden voters in seven swing states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin). They tested the voters' knowledge of eight news stories that liberal news media failed to report properly.

They concluded that this lack of information proved crucial. They discovered that one in every six Biden voters surveyed (17%) said they would have abandoned the Democratic candidate if they had known the facts in one or more of these news stories.

The eight news stories surveyed included three stories that reflected poorly on Joe Biden or Kamala Harris and five stories about Trump administration successes. For example, they found that more than a third (35.4%) didn't know of the Biden sex assault allegations. Nearly half (45.1%) did not know about the scandals involving Hunter Biden. And a quarter (25.3%) of them did not know that Senator Kamala Harris had the most left-wing record of any Senator in 2019.

When they surveyed the Trump successes, they found that anywhere from four in ten to five in ten did not know about economic growth, the creation of 11 million jobs, the Middle East peace deals, energy independence, and Operation Warp Speed.

A total of 17 percent said they would have changed their vote if they had been aware of these issues. This would have moved every one of the swing states into Trump's column and given him 311 electoral votes. This study is illustrative of the impact the mainstream media had on the 2020 election.

## Churches and Pastors

Another place where voters can be educated is in church. But

pastors often want to know how IRS regulations affect what churches might want to do to educate the congregation. Fortunately, Kelly Shackelford and First Liberty Institute have put together a legal summary of what pastors can and cannot do during an election.

Because the church is a 501(c) (3) organization, there are two actions pastors cannot take during an election. First, a pastor or a church may not use the organization to endorse one candidate over another. Second, a pastor or a church may not give its money to one candidate over another.

On the other side, pastors are free to do many things during an election. First, pastors can speak about political issues. “It is a misconception that pastors cannot address political issues—even ‘hot button’ issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, and gun control—from the pulpit.”

Second, pastors can educate their congregation about politics. “Pastors are fully protected when it comes to issues like educating members of their church about the political process, handing out non-partisan voter guides and flyers so members can read about each candidate’s platform, and even providing the opportunity for members to register to vote.”

Third, pastors can invite political candidates to speak at their church. “Contrary to popular belief, pastors and churches can invite political candidates to address their congregation from the pulpit, as long as all the candidates in a race are included in the invitation.”

This is a crucial election. It is time for Christians to get involved.

# Nuclear War

*Kerby Anderson provides an overview of nuclear war from Annie Jacobsen's book Nuclear War: A Scenario with a biblical response.*

## Hell on Earth

Annie Jacobsen begins her book with a scenario:[{1}](#) a one-megaton thermonuclear bomb strikes the Pentagon and vaporizes the building and the 27,000 employees within it. A mile away the marble columns of the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials burst apart and disintegrate. Two and a half miles west at National Park, the clothes of a majority of the 35,000 people watching the ballgame catch on fire.

Her book, *Nuclear War: A Scenario*, takes you through, in a minute-by-minute description, what would happen if a “bolt out of the blue” nuclear attack took place on U.S. soil. This 370-page book isn’t for the faint-hearted, but it is an in-depth investigation in how we got to this place in world history and what would happen if the unthinkable became reality. And the book provides a sequel to the 2023 biographical film, *Oppenheimer*.



Why are we discussing this difficult topic of nuclear war now? First, there is a need to educate a new generation. Although Americans talked about the danger of nuclear war during the Cold War years, much less has been said in recent years. Second, the threat of nuclear war is even greater today because of countries like North Korea that have nuclear weapons and other countries like Iran that are attempting to develop nuclear weapons. Third, this discussion is relevant because so many documents about nuclear war have been declassified. We know so much more about nuclear war than we knew just a few years ago.

It is impossible for our minds to comprehend what happens in a nuclear blast. The air heats to one hundred and eighty million degrees Fahrenheit. This is nearly five times hotter than the temperature in the center of the sun. The blast levels any structure within miles, but also creates winds travelling at several hundred miles per hour.

The nuclear fireball then rises like a hot-air balloon forming the iconic mushroom cloud with cap and stem. Then the inferno begins. Gas lines explode and look like giant blowtorches. Washington, D.C. has now become a mega-inferno. Asphalt streets turn to liquid from the intense heat. More than a million people are dead or dying within two minutes after the detonation.

Outside of the blast area, the electromagnetic pulse obliterates all radio, television, and the Internet. Cars with electric ignition systems cannot start. Water stations cannot pump water. And deadly radiation spreads to those who survived the initial blast.

Nuclear war may be unthinkable, but that is why we are thinking and talking about it.

## Happens Too Fast

Nuclear war could develop unthinkably fast and devastate our world.

An intercontinental ballistic missile is a long-range missile that delivers nuclear weapons to political and military targets on the other side of the world. These ICBMs exist to do one thing: kill millions of people in another country.

Back when the ICBM was invented, Herb York, the Pentagon's chief scientist, wanted to calculate how many minutes it would take for it to reach the Soviet Union.[\[2\]](#) A group of defense scientists estimated that it would take 26 minutes and 40

seconds. From launch to annihilation takes just 1,600 seconds. Nuclear war happens too fast.

Today that estimate varies because we have nine countries that possess nuclear weapons: Russia, France, China, Pakistan, India, Israel, North Korea, the UK, and the US. Given North Korea's geographical location, the launch-to-target time frame from the Korean peninsula to the East Coast of the US would be about 33 minutes.

But a nuclear blast can come even sooner from nuclear-armed, nuclear-powered submarines. These submarines are called "boomers" or even have been called the "handmaidens of the apocalypse." They are undetectable under the sea and can sneak up very close to a nation's coast and launch a first-strike attack. This is why the president actually has only a six-minute window to decide on a nuclear counterattack.

## **Launch on Warning**

America has a policy known as "launch on warning."<sup>[{3}](#)</sup> What that means is that America will launch its nuclear weapons once its early-warning electronic sensor system warns of an impending nuclear attack. Put another way, the US won't wait to check if a warning is accurate, it will not wait and physically absorb a nuclear blow before launching its own nuclear weapons at whoever sent a missile to them.

This policy has been in place since the height of the cold war and represented an incredibly high risk. As one advisor explains, launch on warning during at time of intense crisis is a recipe for catastrophe.

Presidential candidates have promised to change this policy, but nothing has happened so far. George W. Bush in 2000 vowed to address this policy: "Keeping so many weapons on high alert may create an unacceptable risk for accidental or unauthorized launch." Barack Obama argued that "keeping nuclear weapons ready to launch on a moment's notice is a dangerous relic of

the Cold War." President Biden has also encouraged to eliminate this perilous policy. No change has been made.

## President's Football

The decision to launch a nuclear strike comes from the president. How did the government decide to give the president the nuclear football? The story begins with Harold Agnew back in 1959.[{4}](#) He visited a NATO base and noticed there were four F-84F aircraft at the end of the runway; each was carrying two nuclear gravity bombs. This meant that these nuclear bombs were in the custody of one U.S. Army private armed with a M1 rifle with eight rounds of ammunition. The only safeguard against unauthorized use of an atomic bomb was this single GI surrounded by numbers of foreign troops on foreign territory with thousands of Soviet troops just miles away.

When he got back to the U.S., Agnew contacted a project engineer at Sandia Laboratories and asked if they could put an electronic "lock" on the bomb's firing circuits that would prevent others from arming the nuclear bomb. They produced a lock and coded switch that would be activated with a three-digit code.

They presented the idea and the device to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and then to President Kennedy who ordered it to be done. But the military objected. A general asked how a pilot somewhere in the world could get a code from the President of the United States to arm a nuclear weapon before being overrun by a massively superior number of Soviet troops? And why not have other nuclear bombs also coded?

The answer came in the creation of the President's Football, which is an emergency satchel. This gave the president, not the military, control of America's nuclear arsenal. The Football must always be near the president.

There is a story of how important it is for the president to have access to the Football.[{5}](#) When President Clinton was visiting Syria, President Hafez al-Assad's handlers tried to prevent Clinton's military aide from riding in an elevator with him. The Secret Service would not let that happen, and they did not let that happen.

Inside is a set of documents known as the Black Book. Robert "Buzz" Patterson served as a military aide to President Clinton, and I was able to interview him one time on [my radio program](#). He likened the Black Book to a "Denny's breakfast menu" because of how it looked. The president must choose retaliatory targets from a predetermined nuclear strike list on the menu.

Let me end with this question: Do you believe the current president has a mental capacity to make a rational decision of about launching nuclear weapons?

## War Games

One question that was asked more than forty years ago was whether anyone could win a nuclear war. Spoiler alert: no one can. President Reagan ordered a simulated war game with the name Proud Prophet to explore the outcome and long-term effects of a nuclear war.[{6}](#)

The research used mathematical models to predict outcomes and was conducted at the National War College. Participants were cloistered away inside a secure location to prevent leaks. The results were only declassified in 2012, but much of the material was blacked out. Fortunately, this declassification allowed participants to discuss it without violating the Espionage Act of 1917.

Over the two weeks, every simulated scenario ended the same way. Sometimes they began with a tactical nuclear strike and a so-called limited nuclear war. Other times they simulated

exercises with NATO and then with other exercises without NATO. There were scenarios where the U.S. launched nuclear war preemptively. Sometimes that was when the Pentagon was supposedly in focused calm and other when in a crisis mode.

Sadly, the result was the same. Once a nuclear war starts, there is no way to win it or even end it. No matter how a nuclear war begins, it ends with complete Armageddon-like destruction. As one participant put it, this destruction “made all the wars of the past five hundred years pale in comparison.” At least a half billion (and probably more like a billion) people die in the war’s opening salvo. Then billions more die of radiation poisoning and starvation.

### **Nuclear Winter**

When the bombs cease striking targets, the world turns cold and dark. Everything is on fire. Smoke produces noxious smog of pyrotoxins. Fires in the cities ignite other fires. Even in the less-populated areas, forest fires rage.

The density of soot reduces global temperatures by 20-40 degrees depending on the location. Earth plunges into the horror known as a “nuclear winter.” This might be a familiar term for those of us who lived in the 1980s. Astronomer Carl Sagan wrote about it and warned us of the dangers of nuclear war.

A nuclear war would change the troposphere and thus the amount of sunlight reaching the earth. Once the radioactive fog and haze diminish, the ozone layer disappears, and the sun’s warming rays are now killer UV rays.

Earth is no longer as hospitable for humans as it once was. After millennia of planting and harvesting, the few humans to survive return to a hunter-gatherer existence.

## Biblical Perspective

We will conclude this discussion of nuclear war with a biblical perspective. Let's begin with the realization that God is sovereign and in control. But that doesn't mean that He would never allow a nuclear war to take place. Throughout history, we have had tyrants and armies destroy people groups and civilizations. God used pagan nations to judge the nation of Israel.

How should we respond? Since the first atomic bombings at the end of World War II, there has been a condition known as "nuclear anxiety." Jesus instructs us not to "be anxious about tomorrow" (Matthew 6:34), and Paul also tells us not to "be anxious about anything" (Philippians 4:6). Jesus even says that "if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved" (Matthew 24:22).

In the book of Daniel, we have another reminder of God's sovereignty that came in the second dream of Nebuchadnezzar. It reminded him of the fact that God "rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men" (Daniel 4:17). Nebuchadnezzar knew more about human sovereignty than anyone and proclaimed God's sovereignty over the earth at the end of his days (4:34).

Some Christians have suggested that the Bible may be describing a nuclear war. In the book of Revelation, there is a description of the poisoning of the waters (8:11), death of the earth's vegetation (8:17), the end of ocean life (16:3), and the inability to block the sun's rays resulting in severe burns (16:8).

There is a description of stars of heaven falling to earth (6:13) that some have suggested might be describing nuclear missiles raining down on earth during a nuclear war. These would be visible as they enter the atmosphere and begin striking the cities on earth.

Even passages in the Old Testament might point to the effects of a nuclear war. For example, in Zechariah 14:12 we read that “the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.”

One prophecy yet to be fulfilled can be found in Ezekiel 38 that describes nations that will come against Israel. But critics point to the fact that it says they are riding horses, wearing helmets and armor, and wielding swords (38:4-5). That doesn’t look like a modern army. But I remember a famous quote from Albert Einstein: “I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.” The world might look very different after a nuclear war.

In this article we have been discussing the unthinkable: a nuclear war. We should remember the words of Jesus: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

### **Notes**

1. Annie Jacobsen, *Nuclear War: A Scenario*, NY: Dutton, 2024, xvii.
2. Ibid., 53-55.
3. Ibid., 59-60.
4. Ibid., 86-87.
5. Ibid., 84-85.
6. Ibid., 173-178.

# **Jesus, American Politics, and Bearing God's Name**

*Have you ever wondered how to engage in politics as a Christian? How do you filter what our political leaders say through the lens of scripture? How do you determine if someone in a political office just wants your vote and is willing to misuse scripture to do it? Tom Davis addresses the concerns we should have when our political leaders misuse scripture, how to identify their crafty lies, and how to think theologically when listening and evaluating their promises on their political platform.*

I started paying attention to politics around the year 2000. Since then, politics has grown more contentious. The two major parties are suspicious of each other, and the rhetoric has grown even more contentious. Every president elected since 2000 has been declared to be an illegitimate president by some of their opponents. Most political pundits and activists increase the contention, especially during election campaigns. The worst part of this political polarization is that both parties claim Jesus is on their side. How can Jesus be on both sides? What is their evidence that confirms their claim? How should Christians respond?

## **The Third Commandment: Taking God's Name in Vain**

To help us address how politicians use the name of Jesus, it will help to look at the third commandment. The Ten Commandments are found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. God leads the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt, and makes a covenant with His people. In Exodus 20, God gives these commandments as the conditions of His covenant with the Hebrews. In Deuteronomy, these commandments are restated as

the Hebrews are preparing to go into the promised land. The third commandment is, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."[{1}](#)

These commandments were the foundation for the moral behavior that the Hebrew people were to follow to keep their covenant relationship with God. Sometimes there is a particular confusion over the third commandment. A version of this covenant called "The Redneck Ten Commandments" lists the third commandment as "Watch yer mouth." While humorous, this fails to capture the essence of the commandment. Dropping a "g\_d\_\_," or an "OMG" in a conversation is not at the heart of the third commandment. Paul wrote of Jesus, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."[{2}](#) This means that Jesus is God incarnate, which means proclaiming "Jesus Christ!" as an expression of disgust or surprise is the same as the expressions just mentioned. These phrases can violate taking God's name in vain, but are not at the heart of the issue. There are other passages in the Bible that address the use of impure, offensive, or vulgar language.

If vulgar and impious phrases such as GD or OMG are not at the heart of the third commandment, what is this commandment about? I suggest two meanings, both of which we see violated in American politics.

When God gave the Hebrews the Ten Commandments, the people were coming out of Egypt. The people were going into the land promised to them, which was inhabited by the Canaanites. Those people, as well as most people of the Ancient Near East, thought that by invoking a god's name, that god could be manipulated into doing what the people liked. Old Testament scholar Abel Ndjerareon tells us, "Pagans end up believing that they can easily manipulate both the name and the god represented by the name. The name thus becomes a way of controlling, of mastering, and taming the divinity. But the God of Israel refuses to allow his name to be used in this

way. He is not an object to be manipulated.”<sup>{3}</sup> Unlike the gods of the surrounding nations, Yahweh will not be controlled or mastered by people simply because they invoke His name. Old Testament scholar John Walton also states, “The third commandment when read as ancient Near Eastern literature concerns how Yahweh’s power/authority was not to be perceived—people were to recognize it by refraining from attempts to control or misuse it.”<sup>{4}</sup> In the third commandment Yahweh is telling the Hebrews, with whom He just entered a covenant, that He is not like pagan gods. They cannot manipulate Him by using His name.

Politicians do not use God’s name to manipulate God, they use God’s name to manipulate people. People will take God’s name and attach it to a political party or a politician to convince people to vote for them. Currently “Jesus Saves” is not only a statement of faith, now it is also a political banner. Jesus Saves banners were at the January 6th riots. Why? Were people witnessing to other people during the riot? That is not likely. Politicians use the name of God to gather support for campaigns and political ideas that God does not agree with. While they may not be trying to manipulate God, they are trying to manipulate His people.

There is another aspect to taking God’s name in vain. One use of the Hebrew word for “take” could be something like taking up arms, taking things into your own hands, or taking a bag from someone to help them carry groceries.

The word translated as “take” in the third commandment is also translated as “bear” in other parts of the Old Testament. In Exodus 28, God gives Moses the instructions for how to make the priestly garments and how these garments were to be used. One of the garments, like an apron, is called a breastpiece. The breastpiece has twelve stones attached to it. Each stone represents a tribe of Israel. Aaron is to wear this holy garment when entering the tabernacle: “So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on

his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to remembrance before the LORD. And in the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart, when he goes in before the LORD. Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the LORD.”<sup>{5}</sup>

A few verses later Aaron is instructed to wear a headband with a gold plate with “Yahweh” engraved on it. The instructions are: “It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord.”<sup>{6}</sup> In this passage we can see that Aaron is bearing, or representing, Israel before God by wearing the breastpiece. The gold plate on Aaron's forehead signifies that he is God's representative to Israel. In light of the third commandment and these instructions given to Aaron when fulfilling his priestly role, Israel is to represent God (bear or take his name) to the nations just as Aaron represents (bears) Israel before God.<sup>{7}</sup>

We Christians should be involved in politics. There is nothing wrong with Christians running for office, or campaigning for a cause. As Christians we bear God's name. We represent God to other people. This means that how we act, what we say, and how we treat people matters to God. When we take God's name and attach it to a political view that does not accurately represent Him, we bear His name in vain. When we campaign, we must do so in a way that honors God. We must not misrepresent Him.

## American Politics and God

Throughout the history of America, people have appealed to God and the Bible to justify different social and political movements. The earliest people to settle in what became the United States were devout Christians. The Bible informed their

beliefs and way of life. The Founding Fathers had a variety of religious beliefs ranging from Enlightenment Epicureanism (an ancient Greek philosophy that believed that gods did not exist, and only physical things exist) and deism to Protestant Christianity. Most of them saw value in the Bible, even if they were not Christians. Different Americans at different times have appealed to God and the Bible to gain support for slavery, the abolition of slavery, Manifest Destiny (a cultural belief in the 19th-century United States that American settlers were destined to expand across North America, per *Wikipedia*), the humane treatment of Native Americans, Prohibition, and many other movements and goals. However, these movements are not equal when evaluated by the teachings of the Bible. Politicians and activists still appeal to the Bible to rally voters and supporters for their goals. How should current appeals to the Bible be evaluated?

Matthew Dowd, a Democrat who once worked as an advisor to the Bush administration, said, “If Jesus Christ was alive today, He would be called a groomer, He would be called woke, and He would be called a socialist if He was alive today and speaking the message He spoke in the gospels today about treating everybody with dignity.” Dowd went on to say, “Jesus Christ hung around with prostitutes and tax collectors. He was nailed to a cross because He spoke on behalf of the most marginalized people in the Middle East.”<sup>[8]</sup> He also said that a small segment of conservative activists has corrupted Jesus’ message, which Dowd said was “love conquers hate.”

What should we think about Dowd’s statements during the interview? First, notice that Dowd does not quote the Bible at any time during the interview. He references the gospels in a general way. Given that this was a live interview on a news broadcast, I can understand that because time was limited.

The question remains, how do his claims stand up against biblical scrutiny? Would Jesus be called a groomer (slang for a person who builds relationships with children to

manipulate and exploit them)? I think Dowd means that Jesus would be falsely accused of being a groomer. But Dowd seems to think that Jesus would be teaching that same sex intercourse, transgenderism, and things like that are good. I see no evidence of that in the Bible.

Dowd's claim that Jesus died because He spoke out on behalf of marginalized people completely misses the mark. Jesus did disrupt the cultural norms and class divisions of the Jews of that time. Women traveled with Jesus and His disciples. Jesus spoke with the Samaritans. Jesus touched lepers and other unclean people. He even had a tax collector as one of his closest disciples. But there is no indication that He died because He did these things. Jesus did not die for "love conquers hate." The Apostle John tells us, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."<sup>{9}</sup> John also wrote, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not ours only but also the sins of the whole world."<sup>{10}</sup> While Jesus taught that the marginalized should be respected and that the oppressed should be defended, that is not why He died. Jesus did not die for love, He died because He loved the world. His death was not about equality, it was a payment for our sins. Those who confess their sins, oppressors and oppressed, and turn to Jesus as Lord of all creation, will have their sins forgiven.

The latest instance I saw of the Bible being used for politics is California governor Gavin Newsom's campaign billboards promoting the pro-choice position. The bottom of the billboards has Mark 12:31 at the bottom of the poster: "Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these." Newsom seems to think loving your neighbor means supporting abortion. He also left out the first part of Jesus' answer to the question of which command is the greatest, "The most important is, Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your

heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”<sup>{11}</sup> Does Newsom leave this out because he thinks it would make the billboard cluttered? I don’t think so. The question that Newsom needs to answer is, how does promoting the pro-choice position show love for God? Every person bears the image of God. When, in the development of the baby, is the image put in the baby? Because biology, and more importantly, the Bible does not tell us, it seems the most moral and cautious position is to assume that the image of God is in the baby at conception. Let us not forget that the command to love your neighbor is tied to the command to love God. How does abortion show love for God? Every politician or political activist who wants to use passages of the Bible to support their political cause needs to be able to answer these kinds of questions. Leaving these kinds of questions unanswered does not honor the name of God.

During President Trump’s campaign in 2016 he was a guest speaker at Liberty University. The thing most people remember about his speech is that he said “Two Corinthians” instead of “Second Corinthians.” But why should this matter? Christians in England call the book “Two Corinthians.”

The issue in Trump’s speech is the verse he quoted and what was implied by its use. Trump said, “I hear this is a major theme right here. ... Two Corinthians 3:17, that’s the whole ball game . . . ‘Where the spirit of the Lord is,’ right? ‘Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.’ . . . But we are going to protect Christianity.”<sup>{13}</sup> Trump referenced 2 Corinthians 3:17 by quoting part of it, then making the verse about his political campaign, implying that Christian freedom depended on electing him. But what is this verse really about? Here is the verse in context:

“But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one

turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”[{14}](#)

When viewed in context it is clear that 2 Corinthians is about Christ lifting the veil of sin, and the Spirit of the Lord providing freedom from sin. What does this have to do with Trump, or any other American politician? Nothing.

It is clear that American politicians have used the Bible to gain support from Christians. Most of the time politicians are taking passages out of context so that they can try to gain support from Christians to advance their own agenda. When politicians do this, they are bearing God’s name in vain. When we Christians remain silent, we are bearing God’s name in vain. In order to bear God’s name well we must speak what is true and call out what is false. This includes when people, Christian or otherwise, misrepresent God or the teachings of the Bible.

## How Do We Do Politics

Staying out of politics is not a good option. God calls us to be good stewards of the gifts He gives us, one of which is the opportunity to be salt and light in our culture through government. Christians living under dictatorships do not enjoy this blessing. How should we Christians engage in politics then? Where in the Bible can we find guidance? How can we bear God’s name in a way that honors Him in politics? While there are a lot of places to find principles on specific issues, the beatitudes in Matthew 5 are a good place to find general principles for how to engage in politics and life. The beatitudes describe the characteristics that Christians should practice.

The first beatitude is, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”[{15}](#) When we are poor in Spirit, we realize that we “can do no good thing without

divine assistance.” [{16}](#) We must seek God’s will, not our will, in politics. We are not to be about our political vision, but about the business of God’s kingdom. We must humble ourselves before God and make His priorities our priorities.

The second beatitude is, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” When our political opponents face personal crises, we should not celebrate. We do not honor God by hating our political opponents and finding joy in their misfortunes. We should not celebrate the suffering of the liberals, or the conservatives (whichever one you find more annoying). We should still act in love and mourn with them when they suffer personal loss and misfortune. We should pray for them. We should not cover up the failings of our political allies. We should mourn their failures and encourage them to hold themselves to a higher standard.

The third beatitude is, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” As followers of Christ, we know that we depend on God for what we have. We should not be proud of gaining and wielding political power. Followers of Christ inherit the earth because they are meek (biblical meekness is strength under the control of love), not because they wield political power.

The fourth beatitude is, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” We should not engage in corrupt politics, or tolerate those who do. This means calling out corruption in both parties. We cannot ignore political corruption because it is our guy, or we might lose the next election. We must represent God with integrity.

The fifth beatitude is, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” Jesus was not ruthless. God mercifully offers us forgiveness even though we do not deserve it. How can we refuse to show the same mercy to our political rivals?

The sixth beatitude is, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” We are representatives of God, his priests. We must be pure, no matter how much it costs or inconveniences us. We serve God, not the world. We oppose tyranny wherever we find it.

The seventh beatitude is, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” We should be known by our love, not by our feuds. We should forgive and make peace with our political rivals as much as we can. We should not hold grudges or try to punish our political opponents when we have the power to do so.

The eighth beatitude is, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” We know that by holding to pure standards and representing God well we will be persecuted. We will be called Bible thumpers, Kool-Aid drinkers, backwards, deniers, and all kinds of other things. When this happens, we take the persecution and look to God, who will bring us into His kingdom.

The ninth beatitude is, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” When others mock us because we are loyal to Christ, we remain loyal to Christ.

As Christians we bear God’s image in every aspect of our lives. We must bear the image of God well in politics as well. This means that we have to treat others as we want them to treat us, pursue mercy, pursue truth, and pursue peace as best we can. We have to do this because we are bearing God’s image. We are representing Him in everything we do. May God grant us the courage and integrity to represent Him well.

### **Notes**

1. Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11
2. Colossians 1:15
3. Abel Ndjerareon, *Exodus. In Africa Bible Commentary*, ed.

*Tokunboh Adeyemo* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), p. 111.

4. Walton, John, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), p. 121.
5. Exodus 28:29-30 ESV
6. Exodus 28:38 ESV
7. Imes, Carmen Joy, *Bearing God's Name: Why Sin Still Matters* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), pp. 48-52.
8. "MSNBC analyst claims Jesus would be called a 'groomer,' 'woke,' and 'socialist' if 'He was alive today' – TheBlaze," [www.foxnews.com/media/msnbc-analyst-matthew-dowd-jesus-christ-groomer-alive-today](http://www.foxnews.com/media/msnbc-analyst-matthew-dowd-jesus-christ-groomer-alive-today). Accessed 11/12/2022.
9. John 3:16
10. 1 John 2:2
11. Romans 3:23
12. Mark 12:29, 30 ESV
13. "Trump Saying 'Two Corinthians' Doesn't Matter; His Heresy Does | Opinion News," [www.christianpost.com/news/trump-two-corinthians-heresy-liberty.html](http://www.christianpost.com/news/trump-two-corinthians-heresy-liberty.html). Accessed 11/12/2022.
14. 2 Corinthians 3:14-17 ESV
15. The Beatitudes are in Matthew 5:3-12
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## Blessings and Judgment

*The Bible offers principles concerning blessing and judgment concerning the nation of Israel. Do any of them apply to the*

*United States? Kerby Anderson examines this question.*

Is God blessing America? Will God bring judgment against America? These are questions I often hear, and yet rarely do we hear good answers to these questions. Part of the reason is that Christians haven't really studied the subject of blessings and judgment.



In this article we deal with this difficult and controversial subject. While we may not be able to come to definitive answers to all of these questions, I think we will have a better understanding of what blessings and judgment are from a biblical perspective.

When we think about this topic, often we are in two minds. On one hand, we believe that God is on our side and blessing us. After the attacks on 9/11, for example, we launched a war on terror and were generally convinced that God was on our side. At least we hoped that He was. Surely God could not be on the side of the terrorists.

On the other hand, we also wonder if God is ready to judge America. Given the evils of our society, isn't it possible that God will judge America? Haven't we exceeded what other nations have done that God has judged in the past?

In his book *Is God on America's Side?*, Erwin Lutzer sets forth seven principles we can derive from the Old Testament about blessing and cursing. We will look at these in more depth below. But we should first acknowledge that God through His prophets clearly declared when he was bringing judgment. In those cases, we have special revelation to clearly show what God was doing. We do not have Old Testament prophets today, but that doesn't stop Christians living in the church age from claiming (often inaccurately) that certain things are a

judgment of God.

In the 1980s and 1990s we heard many suggest that AIDS was a judgment of God against homosexuality. In my book *Living Ethically In the 90s* I said that it did not look like a judgment from God. First, there were many who engaged in homosexual behavior who were not stricken with AIDS (many male homosexuals and nearly all lesbians were AIDS-free). Second, it struck many innocent victims (those who contracted the disease from blood transfusions). Was AIDS a judgment of God? I don't think so.

When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, people called into [my talk show](#) suggesting this was God's judgment against the city because of its decadence. But then callers from the Gulf Coast called to say that the hurricane devastated their communities, destroying homes, businesses, and churches. Was God judging the righteous church-going people of the Gulf Coast? Was Hurricane Katrina a judgment of God? I don't think so.

In this article we are going to look at blessings and judgments that are set forth by God in the Old Testament so that we truly understand what they are.

## **Seven Principles (Part 1)**

In his book *Is God on America's Side?* Erwin Lutzer sets forth seven principles we can derive from the Old Testament about blessing and cursing. The first principle is that God can both bless and curse a nation.[{1}](#)

When we sing "God Bless America" do we really mean it? I guess part of the answer to that question is what do most Americans mean by the word "God"? We say we believe in God, but many people believe in a god of their own construction. In a sense, most Americans embrace a god of our civil religion. This is not the God of the Bible.

R.C. Sproul says the god of this civil religion is without power: "He is a deity without sovereignty, a god without wrath, a judge without judgment, and a force without power."<sup>{2}</sup> We have driven God from the public square, but we bring him back during times of crisis (like 9/11) but he is only allowed off the reservation for a short period of time.

We sing "God Bless America" but do we mean it? Nearly every political speech and every State of the Union address ends with the phrase, "May God bless America." But what importance do we place in that phrase?

Contrast this with what God said in the Old Testament. God gave Israel a choice of either being blessed or being cursed. "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse; the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

We should first acknowledge that Israel was unique because it had a covenant with God. America does not have a covenant with God. But it does still seem as if the principle of blessing and cursing can apply to nations today.

A second principle is that God judges nations based on the amount of light and opportunity they are given.<sup>{3}</sup> The Old Testament is a story of Israel. Other nations enter the story when they connect with Israel. Because Israel had a unique relationship with God, the nation was judged more strictly than its neighbors.

God was more patient with the Canaanites—it took four hundred years before their "cup of iniquity" was full, and then judgment fell on them. Likewise, Paul points out (Romans 2:12-15) that in the end time, God would individually judge Jews and Gentiles by the amount of light they had when they

were alive.

A nation that is given the light of revelation will be held to greater account than a nation that is not.

## Seven Principles (Part 2)

In his book *Is God on America's Side?* Erwin Lutzer sets forth seven principles we can derive from the Old Testament about blessing and cursing. The third principle is that God sometimes uses exceedingly evil nations to judge those that are less evil.[{4}](#)

Israel was blessed with undeserved opportunities, yet were disobedient. God reveals to Isaiah that God would use the wicked nation of Assyria to judge Israel. "Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury! Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Isaiah 10:5-6). In another instance, God reveals to Habakkuk that He was raising up the Chaldeans to march through the land, plundering, killing, and stealing (Habakkuk 1:5-11).

As I mentioned above, Christians are often of two minds when they think about America. On the one hand they believe America is a great country. We have been willing to rebuild countries after war or natural disaster. American missionaries travel around the world. Christians broadcast the gospel message around the world.

On the other hand, America is a decadent country. We are the leading exporters of pornography and movies that celebrate sex, violence, and profanity. We have aborted more than 50 million unborn babies. Our judicial system banishes God from public life. Will God use another nation to judge America?

A fourth principle is that when God judges a nation, the

righteous suffer with the wicked.[{5}](#) A good example of this can be found in the book of Daniel. When God brought the Babylonians against Judah, Daniel and his friends were forced to accompany them.

We also see a parallel to this in manmade and natural disasters. Whether it is a terrorist attack or a hurricane or tsunami, we see that believers and nonbelievers die together. We live in a fallen world among fallen people. These actions (whether brought about by moral evil or physical evil) destroy lives and property in an indiscriminate way.

A fifth principle is that God's judgments take various forms.[{6}](#) Sometimes it results in the destruction of our families. We can see this in God's pronouncement in Deuteronomy 28:53-55. When the Israelites were forced to leave their homes to go to foreign lands, the warnings were fulfilled. Today we may not be forced into exile, but we wonder if "God is judging our families just the same. He is judging us for our immorality."

In Deuteronomy 28:36-37, "The Lord will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone." When the ten tribes of Israel were exiled to Assyria, they were assimilated into the pagan culture and never heard from again.

## Seven Principles (Part 3)

The sixth principle is that in judgment, God's target is often His people, not just the pagans among them.[{7}](#)

Yes, it is true that God judges the wicked, but sometimes the real purpose of present judgments has more to do with the righteous than the wicked. Not only do we see this in the Old Testament, we also see this principle in the New Testament. 1 Peter 4:17-18 says: "For it is time for judgment to begin at

the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And 'If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?'"

This raises a good question. If judgment begins at the house of God, is the church today under judgment? Have Christians become too worldly? Have Christians become too political and thus depend on government rather than on God? Have Christians become too materialistic? Someone has said we should change the motto on our coins from "In God we trust" to "In gold we trust."

A seventh and final principle is that God sometimes reverses intended judgments.<sup>{18}</sup> We must begin with an observation. God's blessing on any nation is undeserved. There is always sin and evil in the land. When God blesses us, either individually or corporately, it is an evidence of God's grace.

Sometimes God calls for judgment but then spares a nation. A good example of that can be found in the life of Jonah. God called him to that city to preach repentance for their sins. He didn't want to go because it was the capital city of the Assyrians who had committed genocide against Israel. But when Jonah finally obeyed God, the city was saved from judgment.

God also used Old Testament prophets to preach to Israel. But the people didn't have a heart to care. Consider the ministry of Micah and Jeremiah. Actually, Micah preached a hundred years before Jeremiah and warned Judah that her "wound is incurable." A century later, Jeremiah is brought before the priests and false prophets who want him killed. After hearing him, they appeal to the preaching of Micah (Jeremiah 16:19). King Hezekiah listened to Micah's words and sought God who withheld judgment.

Erwin Lutzer gives another example from eighteenth century England. The country was in decline, but God reversed the

trend through the preaching of John Wesley and George Whitefield.

## Conclusion

I would like to conclude by returning to the questions about whether God is blessing or judging our nation.

First, we must acknowledge that no nation can claim that God is on its side. In fact, there is a long and sorry history of nations that have claimed this. And the “God is on our side mentality” has done much harm throughout the history of the church.

Kim Riddlebarger: “Instead of letting God be God, our sinful pride leads us to make such pronouncements that are not ours to make. In these cases, God is not sovereign, he is a mascot.”[{9}](#) As a nation, we must not claim that God is on our side.

This is also true in the political debates we have within this nation. Richard Land in his book, *The Divided States of America*, says: “What liberals and conservatives both are missing is that America has been blessed by God in unique ways—we are not just another country, but neither are we God’s special people. I do not believe that America is God’s chosen nation. God established one chosen nation and people: the Jews. We are not Israel. We do not have “God on our side.” We are not God’s gift to the world.[{10}](#)

This brings us back to the famous quote by Abraham Lincoln who was asked if God was on the side of the Union forces or the Confederate forces. He said: “I do not care whether God is on my side; the important question is whether I am on God’s side, for God is always right.”

Second, we should be careful not to quickly assume that a disease or a disaster is a judgment of God. Above I gave

examples of people wrongly assuming that AIDS or Hurricane Katrina was a judgment of God.

We can take comfort in knowing that this isn't just a problem in the twenty-first century. Apparently it was even a problem in the first century. The tower of Siloam fell and killed a number of people. It appears that those around Jesus thought it was a punishment for their sins. He counters this idea by saying: "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were *worse* culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:4-5).

We should wisely refrain from too quickly labeling a disease or disaster as a judgment of God. But we should take to heart the words of Jesus and focus on our need for salvation and repentance.

## Notes

1. Erwin Lutzer, *Is God on America's Side?* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 11.
2. R.C. Sproul, *When Worlds Collide* (Wheaton: Crossway, 202), 63.
3. Lutzer, *Is God on America's Side?*, 17.
4. *Ibid.*, 25.
5. *Ibid.*, 35.
6. *Ibid.*, 41.
7. *Ibid.*, 49.
8. *Ibid.*, 65.
9. Kim Riddlebarger, "Using God," *Modern Reformation*, November/December 2007, 14.
10. Richard Land, *The Divided States of America* (Nashville: Nelson, 2007), 197.

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# A Biblical View on Inflation

*For some time, we have been told that inflation is either insignificant or that it is transitory. But even now, most economists and government leaders will acknowledge that inflation is here to stay for the foreseeable future. How should we think about inflation from a biblical perspective? What lessons can we learn from the past? How can we prepare for the future?*

## **History of Inflation**

Most countries and empires have had to address the problem of inflation. This includes the nation of Israel. God (speaking through the prophet Isaiah) pronounced judgment on the land because the country that once was full of justice had debased the currency and its products. “Your silver has become dross, your best wine mixed with water” (Isaiah 1:22). People were cheating each other by adding cheaper metals to their silver and by adding water to their wine.

When people do this, it is called counterfeiting and is severely punished. It was punishable by the death penalty in the Roman Empire. Even today, counterfeiting in China warrants life imprisonment. Unfortunately, when governments debase the currency, it is merely called monetary policy and justified to keep the government functioning.

Governments insist on honest weights and measures, but usually exempt themselves from that requirement. Micah 6:11 asks, “Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights?” A government will prosecute someone who has dishonest weights and measures but allow its own government leaders and central bank to debase their currency.

In previous centuries, kings and citizens engaged in coin-clipping. This form of inflation was more visible. Today, paying back investors and citizens with devalued dollars is less visible and more insidious.

In a statement by someone regarded as one of the most important economists of the twentieth century, British economist John Maynard Keynes noted how inflation affects a nation and its citizens. He said: "By a continuing process of inflation, governments can confiscate, secretly and unobserved, an important part of the wealth of their citizens."

He also added, "There is no subtler, no surer means of overturning the existing basis of society than to debauch the currency. The process engages all the hidden forces of economic law that come down on the side of destruction and does so in a manner that not one man in a million is able to diagnose."

What is the impact of inflation? The impact is felt in higher prices. In fact, the classical definition of inflation is "a rise in the general level of prices of goods and services in an economy over a period of time." If you want to calculate the impact of inflation on your family, you can use the mathematical "rule of 72." Take the current inflation rate and divide it into seventy-two. That will give you the number of years at that rate of inflation it will take for prices to double.

## **Consumer Price Index**

Most Americans are starting to realize that the current inflation rate

is different than the consumer price index (CPI). The government uses a different methodology from the past. Here are a few reasons why the CPI is not an accurate measure of inflation.

First, the government's figures understate the inflation rate because they exclude food and fuel costs from its rate of "core inflation." The argument is that food and fuel are too unstable to be included in the inflation rate. But those costs are the ones we consumers feel the most. In fact, most of us spend one-third of our budgets on food and energy costs.

Second, the government also substitutes less expensive products when prices rise. In the past, economists used a "fixed basket of goods" to calculate the consumer price index. In other words, if I buy the very same goods every year, how much does the price rise? Now the government assumes that people will switch brands or foods if the price goes up. For example, if the cost of steak goes up, the consumer price index replaces the cost of steak with hamburger.

Third, in averaging the price of different commodities, the government uses the geometric mean rather than an arithmetic mean. We don't need to get into the math. All you need to know is that technique also decreases the inflation rate.

Fortunately, various websites do provide a more accurate view of inflation. Some of them, for example, use the same basket of goods used in 1980 to estimate the current inflation rate. They conclude that the real inflation rate is more than twice the CPI estimate.

Why did the government change the way it calculates inflation? One reason is that government officials wanted to reduce the cost-of-living adjustments for government pay outs such as Social Security. A lower consumer price index reduces the amount the government must pay beneficiaries for a cost-of-living adjustment.

### **Chuck E. Cheese**

One of my guests, in trying to explain the impact of inflation, compared it to the experience kids and parents had at Chuck E. Cheese. In the past, they would arrive at the

arcade restaurant and purchase twenty dollars' worth of tokens. The kids spent their tokens and won certain games. At the end of the adventure, the kids counted their tickets and took them to the toy counter to purchase a prize.

They were thrilled that they had 1,700 points in children's currency. They were excited to trade those tokens for some real treasures. The toy counter was stocked with iPods, stuffed animals, and all sorts of prizes they are ready to take home. But their excitement faded quickly when they realized that it took 500 points just to purchase a Blow Pop. It took even more to earn a Chinese handcuff. The prizes they really wanted required hundreds of thousands of points.

This is the reality of inflation. If you type in "how much purchasing power has the dollar lost" into a search engine, you will read that "the US dollar has lost more than 96 percent of its purchasing power since the creation of the Federal Reserve in 1913." That would mean that a one-dollar bill from 1913 would have less than four cents of purchasing power today. The federal government has a CPI Inflation Calculator that will give you an estimate of the amount your money has been devalued based on the government's CPI calculations.

### **Causes of Inflation**

Government leaders have been arguing that the current inflation is merely due to the disruption of supply chains. While that is partially true, it ignores the bigger picture. After all, inflation has been taking place long before the pandemic, lockdowns, and supply chain problems.

Business leaders acknowledge that providing a supply of goods due to the supply chain bottleneck has resulted in increased prices. Demand exceeds supply. Also, there are higher costs for employees and higher freight costs. Limited supplies of lumber and copper, for example, raised those costs.

But the bigger issue is the fact that the federal government and the Federal Reserve have been printing more dollars. In the past, other governments (e.g., China, Japan, etc.) would buy our treasuries. They have ceased buying those financial instruments, perhaps because they believe that this country is on an unsustainable trajectory with its high consumption, low-savings economy. This is easy to see on the graphs provided by the Federal Reserve. The M2 money stock has been increasing for many years. You will also notice that the amount of money printed shoots straight up in 2020. On some charts, you may notice something else. The weekly chart is discontinued and only updated monthly. That might give you some idea of what may be coming.

Is inflation good for you and the economy? That is what some pundits and politicians are telling us. Type in words like “inflation is good for you” or “inflation is good for the economy” and you will see the latest attempt to make us feel good about inflation.

On the one hand, inflation is good for the federal government awash in national debt. It is probably good for people in debt. You can pay back debts with devalued dollars. But inflation also allows the federal government to continue to expand without having to live within its means. State governments must live within their means and balance their state budgets. Families are supposed to live within their means, though many take on significant debt. Our previous books, *A Biblical Point of View on Debt* and *A Biblical Point of View on Money* are relevant to these concerns.

On the other hand, inflation is devastating for most people in society. Rich people can invest in appreciating assets (growth stocks, real estate, etc.) while people in the middle class or lower class are hurt by rising prices in food and energy (a significant portion of their monthly expenses). Most Americans are hurt because wages never rise as fast as inflation. Ultimately, inflation makes income inequality even worse.

## **Biblical View on Money and Inflation**

Debt is one of the reasons for the increasing money supply that is causing inflation. The Bible has quite a bit to say about money, and a significant part of these financial warnings concern debt. Proverbs 22:7 says: "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a servant to the lender." When you borrow money and put yourself in debt, you put yourself in a situation where the lender has significant influence over you. The government is spending more than it is bringing in through revenue. The national debt is increasing every day.

The Bible also teaches that it is wrong to borrow and not repay. Psalm 37:21 says: "The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives." The printing of more money has no end in sight. The federal government has been borrowing money from US citizens, foreign governments, and the Federal Reserve. Will we ever repay our debt? Even if we do so, it will be with devalued dollars.

The Bible teaches that individuals (and governments) should have honest weights and measures. Deuteronomy 25:13 says, "You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small" Proverbs 20:10 warns that "Unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord." Ezekiel 45:10 says, "You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath."

How should Christians respond to rising inflation? We should begin by paying our debts. We cannot honestly call for the government to live within its means if we won't set the example and live within our means. We should, "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your harvest; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9-10).

We should also make wise investments. We should begin by diversifying. Solomon gives this investment advice: "Divide

your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth" (Ecclesiastes 11:2). It makes sense to diversify your portfolio since no human being can accurately and consistently predict the future (James 4:13-15). By diversifying your investments, you minimize the risk to your entire portfolio.

We are heading for economic uncertainty. That is why we need to trust the Lord with our wealth (Proverbs 3:9) and be good stewards of the resources God has provided to us (1 Corinthians 4:2).

### **Additional Resources**

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Debt*, 2021

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Money*, 2020

Kerby Anderson, *Christians and Economics*, Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2016.

Bitcoin and Bible Group, chapter three: Inflation, *Thank God for Bitcoin*, Whispering Candle, 2020.

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# **A Christian Worldview Appraisal of Gun Control and the Second Amendment**

*Steve Cable examines the Second Amendment from a biblical perspective.*

In today's America, the Second Amendment invokes intense

arguments regarding its meaning and application. Events like the Newton school, the Aurora movie theater, and the Tucson shopping center shootings bring sorrow to our minds and prayers to our lips. Some say the way to prevent these tragedies is to remove the right for individuals to own and carry firearms. Others argue that firearms carried by responsible individuals could have prevented much, if not all, the carnage of these mass shootings.

Any discussion of the Second Amendment should begin by making sure we are familiar with the wording and the original meaning of this part of our Bill of Rights. The Second Amendment states: “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Although we can reasonably assume the authors of the Bill of Rights and the people of that day felt that this was an unambiguous statement, it is not the case today.



Some believe that the phrase “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms” creates an individual constitutional right. This view is referred to as the “individual right theory,”[\[1\]](#) that legislative bodies are precluded from prohibiting firearm possession. Others argue that the phrase “a well-regulated Militia” means that it was only intended to restrict Congress from legislating away a state’s right of self-defense. This view is called the “collective rights theory.”[\[2\]](#)

In all likelihood, the authors intentionally combined these two thoughts. The states could not muster a militia of their people unless the people were allowed to keep arms. This view is supported by people involved in crafting and/or approving the Bill of Rights. Samuel Adams wrote, “The said Constitution be never construed to authorize Congress to . . . prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms.”[\[3\]](#) Similarly, Noah Webster wrote, “Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed;

as they are in almost every kingdom in Europe. The supreme power in American cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be on any pretense, raised in the United States.”[{4}](#)

Does a Christian worldview provide guidance for our views on the Second Amendment? The Bible does not talk about guns, but does it provide instruction on this issue? In 1 Peter, we learn that governments bear the sword to implement justice. Under our Constitution, we, the people, are ultimately the ones who bear the sword to ensure justice.

## **The Second Amendment: Why Was It Added?**

As discussed above, those responsible for the Second Amendment intended to ensure individuals could bear firearms legally. What concerns led to this original amendment to our constitution?

To understand, we should review the context for the introduction of the Bill of Rights. When the Constitution was sent to the states for ratification in 1787, two groups formed around adding a bill of rights to the Constitution, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. The Federalists supported the Constitution as written, believing that any attempt to list certain rights as remaining with individuals or states would be interpreted as making other rights subject to the federal government. The Anti-Federalists believed it was important to clearly state key fundamental rights over which the federal government would have no jurisdiction. Neither group was arguing against any of the Bill of Rights, but rather whether it was more effective to be silent or to list them explicitly.

The Federalists, who had the majority of delegates to the convention, were wrong in assuming that most people would agree with their hands-off approach. This situation led to

many of the states ratifying the Constitution with the stipulation that a bill of rights be added. The right to bear arms was a common component of these stipulations. As James Madison wrote in the Federalist Papers, “The advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation . . . forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition . . . The several kingdoms of Europe . . . are afraid to trust the people with arms.”<sup>{5}</sup>

When the first Congress met, James Madison presented a bill of rights before the members of the House. The first Congress converted these into twelve amendments which were sent back to the states for ratification in September of 1789. The language which would become the Second Amendment was essentially unchanged from that offered by Madison. On March 1, 1792, Thomas Jefferson announced the ratification of the United States Bill of Rights.

In Romans, Paul wrote, “But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for (governing authorities) do not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.”<sup>{6}</sup> However, if government officials hold all power, those who would control us will seek that power by taking over the government. In our constitutional system, the people are the ultimate governing authorities and thus are given the right to bear arms to protect the nation against those who would take over for the practice of evil.

## **The Second Amendment: How Is It Applied Today?**

As noted previously, two different thoughts arose in interpreting the Second Amendment, namely the “individual rights theory” and the “collective rights theory.” Which view is supported by the Supreme Court?

In the most recent ruling of 2008, the court ruled

the amendment confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes such as self-defense. It also determined that the clause concerning a well-regulated militia does not limit the part which clearly states an individual's right to keep and bear arms. Thus, the Court affirmed the "individual rights theory" of interpretation.

Remember, the framers of the Second Amendment were aware that guns held by individuals could be used for criminal activity. They felt that protecting individual liberty was more important than trying to create a perfectly safe environment. However, it should not be interpreted that everyone should have equal access to firearms. The Court has supported laws which 1) restrict those with mental problems or a criminal background in acquiring guns and 2) limit general access to specific types of weapons for mass destruction.

The difficult question is, when does the government cross the line into the realm of interfering with a person's rights? First, what is meant by arms; does it include tanks, RPGs, etc.? Second, what could legally preclude a person's right to bear arms? What type of personality or personality disorder makes it dangerous to others for you to carry a gun?

On the first question, the answer is not defined by what is needed for hunting or protection from thieves. From the perspective of the Founding Fathers, it needs to be weapons such that if a sufficient number of people possess them, the government is unable through the force of an army to impose any unconstitutional burdens upon the people. The Court's position is that rifles and handguns are sufficient and that the government has the right to control other types of weapons.

The second question is equally difficult: how does one determine who is sane enough to have the right to bear arms? The Court has allowed this to be defined in terms of mental deficiencies, mental problems and a criminal

background.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, we are told to pray for those in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life with all godliness and dignity. Our Constitution indicates that we are to take up arms as necessary to protect a government supporting godliness and dignity. It is reasonable to preclude those without a sane concept of a quiet and peaceful life from accessing firearms, which would always be a small minority of the populace.

## **The Second Amendment: Should It Be Ignored?**

To this point, we have laid out the history and the status of our right to bear arms. We have three possible responses: 1) accept and obey this law, 2) ignore it as counter to God's greater law, or 3) work to repeal the law. Let us first consider the question, "Is this a law that we should ignore?"

As spelled out in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, Christians are to uphold the laws of our land. Although no specific governmental system is promoted in the New Testament, we appreciate a system that protects our ability to worship God consistent with 1 Timothy 2:1-2. We support protecting the individual religious freedom offered by this country. At the same time, we want to limit robbery, murder and mayhem. How do these potentially conflicting desires relate to our view of the Second Amendment?

Remember, its underlying purpose is to ensure that our freedoms as individuals and as states are never trampled on by the federal government or others. The framers of the Constitution were worried about the tendency of large governments to attempt to consolidate their power at the expense of freedom. As Christians, we should desire to live in a society where we are free to worship God and share our faith with others.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, we see that we should pray for such a society because "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." As citizens of this nation, the Second Amendment makes it clear that we have a responsibility to protect our rights from those who would attempt to abuse their position, to maintain our freedoms including our freedom to live godly lives and share Christ freely.

In 2 Peter 2:13-14, we are to submit "for the Lord's sake to every human institution," whether to a king or his representatives. Within our structure of government, we submit to our Constitution and its principles. The Second Amendment calls for us (if needed) to be armed and ready as individuals to participate in a state militia or, in the absence of a militia, to act as individuals to protect our liberty. In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that this also confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes.

Clearly, the right to bear arms as defined in our Constitution and explained by Supreme Court rulings is not counter to biblical teaching. Therefore, we are to act in accordance with this amendment to our Constitution. Whether we should try to repeal this law is discussed below.

## **The Second Amendment: Should It Be Repealed?**

If the Second Amendment creates more harm than good, we can support repealing it. The main argument for this position is that guns are used by some to harm the innocent. If guns are freely available to the citizenry, does the harm done outweigh the value envisioned by the Second Amendment?

Many innocent people have been killed by deranged individuals and criminals with guns; at the same time, we cannot remember

a time when American citizens were called to the streets to protect our Constitution. Have we reached a point where the nature of today's weapons and our society make the Second Amendment a detriment?

One group argues that if private ownership was illegal and strictly enforced, it would severely limit gun violence. An opposing view believes the problem is actually worsened by the lack of gun ownership by the public. If more law abiding citizens were armed and prepared to respond, the number of people killed would drop due to the deterrent effect.

What is the problem with repealing the Second Amendment? To have no guns among the citizenry, the government must be very proactive in removing guns from society as a whole. Guns must be removed from those not inclined to obey&mdash; a very difficult task as evidenced by the prevalence of alcohol during Prohibition. If accomplished, the government must assume unprecedented powers which may be fine as long as the Constitutional is not usurped. But if a future government decides to do so, there will be nothing to stop it.

Swords were used to kill people in Jesus' day. Did Jesus rail against the presence of swords and demand that no one but soldiers should carry them? No, in fact, he told His disciples that he who had no sword should buy one because of the troubled days ahead.<sup>{7}</sup> Peter was carrying his sword in the garden when Jesus was arrested.<sup>{8}</sup> While Jesus kept Peter from interfering with His arrest, Jesus did not use that situation to initiate a "sword control" campaign.

Perhaps a more sensible way to control gun violence would be to encourage law-abiding citizens to carry weapons, particularly in public areas. This approach creates a deterrent against the insane, the criminal, and a future government gone amok.

According to Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3, in the last days,

swords will be beaten into plowshares and nations will no longer lift up the sword against other nations. We are clearly not in those last days now. Keeping the Second Amendment in place highlights our commitment to a government “of the people, by the people and for the people,” while we wait for Christ’s bodily return.

## Notes

1. *Second Amendment*, Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School, [www.law.cornell.edu/wex/second\\_amendment](http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/second_amendment)
2. Ibid.
3. Philip Mulivor, *Proclaiming Liberty: What Patriots and Heroes Really Said about the Right to Keep and Bear Arms*, Brightman Press, New York, 2011 quoting Samuel Adams, Amendment introduced on 6 Feb. 1788 in the Massachusetts ratifying convention, qtd. *In Debates and Proceeding in the Convention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Held in the Year 1788*
4. Ibid., Noah Webster, “An Examination of the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution.” *Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States Published During Its Discussion by the People 1787-1788*.
5. Ibid., James Madison, “Paper 46,” *The Federalist Papers*.
6. Romans 13:4
7. Luke 22:35-38
8. John 18:10

# Crimping Consciences: Texas City Railroads Pro-Gay Ordinance

*Byron Barlowe blogs about the his city's Anti-Discrimination ordinance intended to give full recognition to the LGBT community at the expense of those who disagree.*

## New Anti-Discrimination Policy Approved

According to the [\*Dallas Morning News Plano Blog\*](#), "In a split vote Monday, the Plano City Council passed the controversial Equal Rights Policy [ERP] over the objections of many residents in the standing-room-only crowd.

The amendment to the city's 1989 anti-discrimination policy extends protections from housing, employment and public accommodation discrimination to include sexual orientation, gender identity and other categories" like veterans. While no one objected to the inclusion of veterans, an overwhelming number of surprised and very lately aware (as in, the day of) citizens voiced strong opposition. These objections, while noted, seemed to make little to no difference to the city council and certainly to Mayor Harry LaRosiliere, who was so eager to vote for the statute that he went out of order during proceedings.

As a Plano resident who publicly urged the council to vote "No" on the measure, I offer some reflections on the issue—both local and larger—from a biblically informed worldview.

## Good Intentions: Trying to Legislate

## **Values Directly**

Rather than seeking to legislate merely out of a set of values—an unavoidable reality—the Plano City Council clearly tried to impose a set of values directly onto the public by adopting this more expansive anti-discrimination ordinance. Such legislative overreach has become part and parcel of an increasingly politically correct polity known as the United States of America. Plano is now more PC. While this kind of ordinance is not only inadvisable because it cannot hope to work well, it also steps beyond the scope of a proper role of government.

**IT CANNOT WORK BECAUSE . . .**

We often hear the phrase “You can’t legislate morality.” Well, yes and no. While the very nature of human law at its root is a delineation of and codification of right vis a vis wrong—that is, strictures or incentives administered by the state as a morally informed code of conduct—it is also true that government cannot successfully impose morality, *per se*, onto the consciences of their citizens.

Yet, that is precisely what such ordinances as Plano’s ERP seeks to do. Plano’s “out” regarding the problem of conscientious objection? City Attorney Paige Mims assures us that if anyone outside of the many exempted statuses has a moral or religious objection, they can go through a waiver process. This is, on its face, an undue imposition on businesspeople who don’t fall under exempted categories like education, non-profit or religious. Recent legal precedent (see Hobby Lobby case) makes clear that religious businesses do not somehow lay down their rights of conscience when they go into business.

**ROLE OF GOVERNMENT. . .**

When government entities try to arbitrate motives, for example hate crimes laws that purport to regulate actions based on the attitudinal intent of the actor, it steps into a sphere where

it does not, indeed it cannot, belong. In other words, it takes on a godlike sovereignty to righteously discern between this and that intention. Can't be done. Not righteously. Not fairly.

People—including city legal departments and judges—are fallible humans who lack the innate ability to administer justice based primarily or solely on someone's internal motivation. “The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out” (Proverbs 20:5). Drawing out the “purposes” of a man's or woman's heart is certainly not a governmental role. But this is what it takes to know motives, a role only God claims full access to, and a role traditionally reserved for clergy, other spiritual advisers and psychologists.

Here is a pithy bunch of [biblical worldview teaching on the role of government](#).

Biblically, the proper role of government is founded in limits primarily written in Romans 13. As I understand it, a biblical worldview on government's role is limited to: fighting wars, passing and enforcing laws concerning public human interactions and that's about it. Anything else falls under the jurisdiction of religious and social institutions. Government: stay out!

**I'm not arguing for such a state of affairs as an absolute in the real world**, but as a plumb line to measure when government has stepped over its proper boundaries. In the case of Plano's ERP government has overstepped.

## Progressivism on Parade

The subtext of public deliberations on Plano's ERP was plainly a progressive agenda. Why else would a city seek to get “ahead of the curve” on a social issue such as gender bias or sexual identity discrimination or whatever the euphemism is today?

(Refer above to the value of limited role of government, which was expressed repeatedly to the council by citizens of Plano.) The council, challenged that there are no known cases of such discrimination, seemed to shrug dismissively and invoke the need to “get ahead of” the issue.

“The issue of equality is a basic human rights issue and the choice for some to focus on a person’s sexuality is conflating the issue,” said the Mayor. Conflating what with what? Either the mayor misunderstands the term “conflating” (making things the same) or he’s basically accusing objectors of the very thing that has been foisted upon them—namely, making one’s sexual choices (not their true sexuality) the determiner of human rights. This is like watching someone start a fight over a piece of land and then accusing the one attacked of starting that same fight over that very piece of land!

Questioning the need for the statute was otherwise met with a not-so-veiled sense of accusation, an implication of inherent bias on the part of the objectors, despite an overall congenial atmosphere. So, if I question the veracity of the claim to need such a policy or ask for reasonable cause, I am automatically anti-gay? That’s patently false and unfair. Yet that was the sense of things in a politically correct undercurrent that is the zeitgeist of our day.

## Worldview War

This is the serious game begun back in the 1970s by Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen who spelled out the propaganda project of the gay lobby in a book titled *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear & Hatred of Gays in the 90s*. Now that their jamming (name-calling, guilt by association and other tactics) have worked so well, only an implicit inference need be made at such meetings as Monday night’s. It has a chilling—no—a virtual shutdown effect.

Yet, many citizens displayed aplomb when speaking on the

Constitution and related matters. Businesspeople appealed to the unfairness of having to seek redress through a voucher system. One person well said in response: “The Constitution is my waiver.” First Amendment (or any other) rights do not require special permission. It’s government’s role merely to ensure them, which Plano may think it’s doing by elevating ever more special interests to protected status. That is an upside-down approach that’s illegitimate no matter how much case law exists or how many other cities and companies enact similar policies.

## **The “We’re Just Following” Fallacy**

An admittedly very arguable point I’d like to add: Mayor LaRosiliere and City Attorney Mims claimed that other major cities in Texas have such statutes on the books. Hence we are not, as implicated, “out front” taking legal risks, but rather are following others’ lead. This seems disingenuous.

Are we “out in front” of the issue or are we, as strongly emphasized by the Mayor, simply one in a fairly long line of municipalities trying to codify fair treatment to people of all lifestyles and segments? One could make the case that Plano is in the vanguard overall but not first in implementation. However, that is unsatisfactory to many. You can’t ultimately have it both ways: either you’re progressive on social issues (which does not truly reflect Plano well) or you’re just falling in line with current legal trends.

## **The “Gay Gene” at the Bottom of the Debate**

One thing is sure: *increased expansion of rights and privileges to previously unaddressed parties is the trend in our culture—and lots of it has to do with sexuality in a newly politicized way.* But we thought government was supposed to get out of our bedrooms?

Any claim to that distinction has been lost with the adoption of the near-universal belief in what amounts to a “[gay gene](#)”—that a person inherently possesses a sexual identity that may indeed be homosexual or of other varieties. This, over and against a mere proclivity or attraction to the same sex, which leaves room for choice, which is an ethical issue. Remove choice regarding homosexuality, you remove any basis of objection. Remove objection, you can run roughshod over any cultural restraints on the free and damaging expression of sexuality outside the bounds of its Inventor, God. Remove those restrictions, celebrate the lifestyle, then codify and impugn those who disagree, and the After the Ball agenda is a complete success.

Monday night’s meeting was an incremental victory toward this end, whether or not players on the city council or either side of the issue realized it. Regarding objectors’ motives, it’s one thing to care for individuals whose sexual identity is in question or those who act out a gay lifestyle and it’s another kind of thing entirely to exercise one’s rights to oppose codification of these choices and lifestyles. I and many of my friends there that night were doing one while we practice the other in private situations, too.

There is no cognitive dissonance or hypocrisy here—one can do both public square advocacy of conservative values and also outreach to individuals who struggle in a certain area of sin—namely other-than-heterosexual-wed sex. True Christlike love does not affirm that which the Bible condemns, but shows grace nonetheless.

## **There is a Precedent for Unintended Consequences and Abuse**

Plano’s ERP sets up the same oppression of religious objectors that has been seen already across the U.S. with cake bakers, wedding venue owners and others who—for reasons of

conscience—refuse to do business with certain parties in select situations like gays getting married. Yes, exemptions were written into Plano's ordinance, but does anyone seriously believe these will stand up under judicial scrutiny in this day and age? The erosion of rights continues—and saying so, again, is not to be confused with [intolerance](#).

This brand of identity politics is rooted in the cultural adoption of the doctrine of a gay gene ("God or nature made me this way!"), which is at a worldview level, where most objectors to the statute were coming from. We object to the underlying presupposition that homosexuality is not utterly tied up with choice, which is so fundamental to opposition to the gay rights issue. (I almost come off as a throwback rube for even bringing it up in today's enlightened culture—which furthers my point!)

## **The Condescension that Falsely Pits Feelings vs. Facts**

Monday night's proceedings—at least from the point of view of the city council—were saturated with what has been called the Sacred / Secular Split. On this view, there are basically two levels of discourse: an area of public life informed largely by science but also by enlightened social values (invariably liberal / progressive / non-traditional ones) balanced unevenly by a lesser valued, private world of emotional / psychological / religious sentiments.

The former—where real knowledge resides—should supposedly be the domain of public policy. The latter—again, a private set of often closely held feelings and values that should have no sway in the public arena yet the existence of which are somewhat guarded by government and other institutions—are to be tolerated as inevitable but will hopefully catch up with social contracts like those being forged by the gay lobby and societal institutions across the waterfront. The notion is:

"You have a right to your private opinion. Just don't bring it into the public square."

This attitude, this taken-for-granted starting place was most evident in closing remarks made by several city council members—all of whom happened to vote for the policy. One council member waxed eloquent on his world travels, noting that the most advanced societies he'd run across made it a point never to discriminate. (I don't know where he's been, but perhaps his hotel's staff might beg to differ—just guessing.)

More poignantly, he and another council member who said that her Christian faith informed her "yes" vote, was only one more who joined a chorus of comments like:

"There were lots of strong feelings on the topic of discussion tonight" and

"This is a very emotional issue for many. . . ."

The plain inference was that objections were raised out of the private, sacred area of life, laden with "emotion" and "feelings" while effective debate occurred on the level of law, fact and agreed-upon societal norms (at least the evolving kind that our "City of Excellence" wants to be known for).

Pronouncements by a clergy woman (Disciples of Christ) who serves as an officer of a Plano Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender association, the mayor and at least one more gay advocate that the passage of the ERP was just "the right thing to do" obviously paints the vast majority of citizens as those who want to do the wrong thing. According to Mayor LaRosiliere, "Providing equal rights to everyone is the right thing to do." Rights to what? Rights in displacement of whose rights? The task in a pluralistic society is to find that fairest middle ground—and that failed Monday night.

Apparently bigotry, at least ignorance, was the only thing standing in the way of Plano's ERP. Thank you for the condescension. Which leads to my final point: the race card was deftly played by none other than Mayor LaRosiliere where it has no place. And the Mayor did precisely what he accused others of of doing, that is . . .

## . . . Conflating Race & Sexual Lifestyle

Plano's Mayor ended deliberations (or nearly did) with [a speech](#) on the equivalency of historical human rights movements to the current push for special privileges for sexual identities and lifestyles. His well-written story arc was centered on the question, "Why are we doing this now?" In a series of juxtaposed historical references, he posed the question he deemed was being needlessly asked about Plano's Equal Rights Protection ordinance: **Why pass this now if there is no case on record of any discrimination?** In the case of the infamous Dredd-Scott Supreme Court decision that ruled blacks were 3/5 of a person one might ask, he said, "Why are we doing this now?"

"If we spoke in 1919," LaRosiliere continued, "to allow women to vote, the question would be, 'Why are you oppressing me and making me subject to this now.'" He went on to paint discrimination against the Irish in early 19th Century New York and segregation in the South in the 20th Century as morally equivalent instances comparable to the current situation—ostensibly oppression of gay, lesbian and transgender citizens.

Very cleverly devised rhetorical device, that. But it **presupposes a moral equivalency that a black man sitting beside me rejected outright.** This gentlemen from Nigeria was so confused by the proceedings and the Mayor's speech capping them off that he was convinced the entire issue at hand was racism! When I asked him this question, he unequivocally answered "No!": "Do you think that homosexual identity is the

same kind of thing as you being black or being from Nigeria?"

"No!"

And rightly, **my new African friend—who is a Christian—was bothered by the conflation of the two and the use of such rhetoric to elevate a class of people based on their sinful behavior and identity to it as the basis to extend so-called human rights. We all have the right to fair treatment as humans made in God's image. We do not have a right to socially engineer law to force the compromise of conscience that is being carried out by Plano's new ordinance.**

As I pleaded with the council not to allow, we will surely read about this case going to court, being found unconstitutional and otherwise unlawful and costing this taxpayer and all others unnecessarily.

Ideas, worldviews, do indeed have consequences.

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## **Capital Punishment: A Christian View and Biblical Perspective**

*Kerby Anderson provides a biblical worldview perspective on capital punishment. He explores the biblical teaching to help us understand how to consider this controversial topic apply Christian love and biblical principles.*

Should Christians support the death penalty? The answer to that question is controversial. Many Christians feel that the Bible has spoken to the issue, but others believe that the New Testament ethic of love replaces the Old Testament law.

# Old Testament Examples

Throughout the Old Testament we find many cases in which God commands the use of capital punishment. We see this first with the acts of God Himself. God was involved, either directly or indirectly, in the taking of life as a punishment for the nation of Israel or for those who threatened or harmed Israel.

One example is the flood of Noah in Genesis 6-8. God destroyed all human and animal life except that which was on the ark. Another example is Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18-19), where God destroyed the two cities because of the heinous sin of the inhabitants. In the time of Moses, God took the lives of the Egyptians' first-born sons (Exod. 11) and destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Exod. 14). There were also punishments such as the punishment at Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 13-14) or the rebellion of Korah (Num. 16) against the Jews wandering in the wilderness.

The Old Testament is replete with references and examples of God taking life. In a sense, God used capital punishment to deal with Israel's sins and the sins of the nations surrounding Israel.

The Old Testament also teaches that God instituted capital punishment in the Jewish law code. In fact, the principle of capital punishment even precedes the Old Testament law code. According to Genesis 9:6, capital punishment is based upon a belief in the sanctity of life. It says, "Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God, He made man."

The Mosaic Law set forth numerous offenses that were punishable by death. The first was murder. In Exodus 21, God commanded capital punishment for murderers. Premeditated murder (or what the Old Testament described as "lying in wait") was punishable by death. A second offense punishable by death was involvement in the occult (Exod. 22; Lev. 20; Deut.

18-19). This included sorcery, divination, acting as a medium, and sacrificing to false gods. Third, capital punishment was to be used against perpetrators of sexual sins such as rape, incest, or homosexual practice.

Within this Old Testament theocracy, capital punishment was extended beyond murder to cover various offenses. While the death penalty for these offenses was limited to this particular dispensation of revelation, notice that the principle in Genesis 9:6 is not tied to the theocracy. Instead, the principle of *Lex Talionis* (a life for a life) is tied to the creation order. Capital punishment is warranted due to the sanctity of life. Even before we turn to the New Testament, we find this universally binding principle that precedes the Old Testament law code.

## New Testament Principles

Some Christians believe that capital punishment does not apply to the New Testament and church age.

First we must acknowledge that God gave the principle of capital punishment even before the institution of the Old Testament law code. In Genesis 9:6 we read that “Whoever sheds man’s blood by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God, He made man.” Capital punishment was instituted by God because humans are created in the image of God. The principle is not rooted in the Old Testament theocracy, but rather in the creation order. It is a much broader biblical principle that carries into the New Testament.

Even so, some Christians argue that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus seems to be arguing against capital punishment. But is He?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is not arguing against the principle of a life for a life. Rather He is speaking to the issue of our personal desire for vengeance. He is not denying

the power and responsibility of the government. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is speaking to individual Christians. He is telling Christians that they should not try to replace the power of the government. Jesus does not deny the power and authority of government, but rather He calls individual Christians to love their enemies and turn the other cheek.

Some have said that Jesus set aside capital punishment in John 8 when He did not call for the woman caught in adultery to be stoned. But remember the context. The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus between the Roman law and the Mosaic law. If He said that they should stone her, He would break the Roman law. If He refused to allow them to stone her, He would break the Mosaic law (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Jesus' answer avoided the conflict: He said that he who was without sin should cast the first stone. Since He did teach that a stone be thrown (John 8:7), this is not an abolition of the death penalty.

In other places in the New Testament we see the principle of capital punishment being reinforced. Romans 13:1-7, for example, teaches that human government is ordained by God and that the civil magistrate is a minister of God. We are to obey government for we are taught that government does not bear the sword in vain. The fact that the Apostle Paul used the image of the sword further supports the idea that capital punishment was to be used by government in the New Testament age as well. Rather than abolish the idea of the death penalty, Paul uses the emblem of the Roman sword to reinforce the idea of capital punishment. The New Testament did not abolish the death penalty; it reinforced the principle of capital punishment.

## **Capital Punishment and Deterrence**

Is capital punishment a deterrent to crime? At the outset, we should acknowledge that the answer to this question should not change our perspective on this issue. Although it is an important question, it should not be the basis for our belief. A Christian's belief in capital punishment should be based

upon what the Bible teaches not on a pragmatic assessment of whether or not capital punishment deters crime.

That being said, however, we should try to assess the effectiveness of capital punishment. Opponents of capital punishment argue that it is not a deterrent, because in some states where capital punishment is allowed the crime rate goes up. Should we therefore conclude that capital punishment is not a deterrent?

First, we should recognize that crime rates have been increasing for some time. The United States is becoming a violent society as its social and moral fabric breaks down. So the increase in the crime rate is most likely due to many other factors and cannot be correlated with a death penalty that has been implemented sparingly and sporadically.

Second, there is some evidence that capital punishment is a deterrent. And even if we are not absolutely sure of its deterrent effect, the death penalty should be implemented. If it is a deterrent, then implementing capital punishment certainly will save lives. If it is not, then we still will have followed biblical injunctions and put convicted murderers to death.

In a sense, opponents of capital punishment who argue that it is not a deterrent are willing to give the benefit of the doubt to the criminal rather than to the victim. The poet Hyman Barshay put it this way:

*The death penalty is a warning, just like a lighthouse throwing its beams out to sea. We hear about shipwrecks, but we do not hear about the ships the lighthouse guides safely on their way. We do not have proof of the number of ships it saves, but we do not tear the lighthouse down."(1)*

If capital punishment is even a potential deterrent, that is a significant enough social reason to implement it.

Statistical analysis by Dr. Isaac Ehrlich at the University of Chicago suggests that capital punishment is a deterrent.(2) Although his conclusions were vigorously challenged, further cross- sectional analysis has confirmed his conclusions.(3) His research has shown that if the death penalty is used in a consistent way, it may deter as many as eight murders for every execution carried out. If these numbers are indeed accurate, it demonstrates that capital punishment could be a significant deterrent to crime in our society.

Certainly capital punishment will not deter all crime. Psychotic and deranged killers, members of organized crime, and street gangs will no doubt kill whether capital punishment is implemented or not. A person who is irrational or wants to commit a murder will do so whether capital punishment exists or not. But social statistics as well as logic suggest that rational people will be deterred from murder because capital punishment is part of the criminal code.

## **Capital Punishment and Discrimination**

Many people oppose capital punishment because they feel it is discriminatory. The charge is somewhat curious since most of the criminals that have been executed in the last decade are white rather than black. Nevertheless, a higher percentage of ethnic minorities (African-American, Hispanic-American) are on death row. So is this a significant argument against capital punishment?

First, we should note that much of the evidence for discrimination is circumstantial. Just because there is a higher percentage of a particular ethnic group does not, in and of itself, constitute discrimination. A high percentage of whites playing professional ice hockey or a high percentage of blacks playing professional basketball does not necessarily mean that discrimination has taken place. We need to look beneath the allegation and see if true discrimination is taking place.

Second, we can and should acknowledge that some discrimination does take place in the criminal justice system. Discrimination takes place not only on the basis of race, but on the basis of wealth. Wealthy defendants can hire a battery of legal experts to defend themselves, while poor defendants must rely on a court-appointed public attorney.

Even if we acknowledge that there is some evidence of discrimination in the criminal justice system, does it likewise hold that there is discrimination with regard to capital punishment? The U.S. Solicitor General, in his *amicus* brief for the case *Gregg vs. Georgia*, argued that sophisticated sociological studies demonstrated that capital punishment showed no evidence of racial discrimination.(4) These studies compared the number of crimes committed with the number that went to trial and the number of guilty verdicts rendered and found that guilty verdicts were consistent across racial boundaries.

But even if we find evidence for discrimination in the criminal justice system, notice that this is not really an argument against capital punishment. It is a compelling argument for reform of the criminal justice system. It is an argument for implementing capital punishment carefully.

We may conclude that we will only use the death penalty in cases where certainty exists (e.g., eyewitness accounts, videotape evidence). But discrimination in the criminal justice system is not truly an argument against capital punishment. At its best, it is an argument for its careful implementation.

In fact, most of the social and philosophical arguments against capital punishment are really not arguments against it at all. These arguments are really arguments for improving the criminal justice system. If discrimination is taking place and guilty people are escaping penalty, then that is an argument for extending the penalty, not doing away with it.

Furthermore, opponents of capital punishment candidly admit that they would oppose the death penalty even if it were an effective deterrent.(5) So while these are important social and political issues to consider, they are not sufficient justification for the abolition of the death penalty.

## **Objections to Capital Punishment**

One objection to capital punishment is that the government is itself committing murder. Put in theological terms, doesn't the death penalty violate the sixth commandment, which teaches "Thou shalt not kill?"

First, we must understand the context of this verse. The verb used in Exodus 20:13 is best translated "to murder." It is used 49 times in the Old Testament, and it is always used to describe premeditated murder. It is never used of animals, God, angels, or enemies in battle. So the commandment is not teaching that all killing is wrong; it is teaching that murder is wrong.

Second, the penalty for breaking the commandment was death (Ex.21:12; Num. 35:16-21). We can conclude therefore that when the government took the life of a murderer, the government was not itself guilty of murder. Opponents of capital punishment who accuse the government of committing murder by implementing the death penalty fail to see the irony of using Exodus 20 to define murder but ignoring Exodus 21, which specifically teaches that government is to punish the murderer.

A second objection to capital punishment questions the validity of applying the Old Testament law code to today's society. After all, wasn't the Mosaic Law only for the Old Testament theocracy? There are a number of ways to answer this objection.

First, we must question the premise. There is and should be a relationship between Old Testament laws and modern laws. We

may no longer be subject to Old Testament ceremonial law, but that does not invalidate God's moral principles set down in the Old Testament. Murder is still wrong. Thus, since murder is wrong, the penalty for murder must still be implemented.

Second, even if we accept the premise that the Old Testament law code was specifically and uniquely for the Old Testament theocracy, this still does not abolish the death penalty. Genesis 9:6 precedes the Old Testament theocracy, and its principle is tied to the creation order. Capital punishment is to be implemented because of the sanctity of human life. We are created in God's image. When a murder occurs, the murderer must be put to death. This is a universally binding principle not confined merely to the Old Testament theocracy.

Third, it is not just the Old Testament that teaches capital punishment. Romans 13:1-7 specifically teaches that human government is ordained by God and that we are to obey government because government does not bear the sword in vain. Human governments are given the responsibility to punish wrongdoers, and this includes murderers who are to be given the death penalty.

Finally, capital punishment is never specifically removed or replaced in the Bible. While some would argue that the New Testament ethic replaces the Old Testament ethic, there is no instance in which a replacement ethic is introduced. As we have already seen, Jesus and the disciples never disturb the Old Testament standard of capital punishment. The Apostle Paul teaches that we are to live by grace with one another, but also teaches that we are to obey human government that bears the sword. Capital punishment is taught in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

#### Notes

1. Hyman Barshay, quoted in "On Deterrence and the Death Penalty" by Ernest van den Haag, *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science* no. 2 (1969).

2. Isaac Ehrlich, "The Deterrent Effect of Capital Punishment: A Question of Life and Death," *American Economic Review*, June 1975.

3. *Journal of Legal Studies*, January 1977; *Journal of Political Economy*, June 1977; *American Economic Review*, June 1977.

4. Frank Carrington, *Neither Cruel nor Unusual: The Case for Capital Punishment* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington, 1978), 118.

5. Further discussion of these points can be found in an essay by Ernest van den Haag, "The Collapse of the Case Against Capital Punishment," *National Review*, 31 March 1978, 395-407.

A more complete discussion of capital punishment can be found in chapter 10 of *Living Ethically in the 90s* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990), available from Probe Ministries.

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