



**FIGHT BY FLIGHT**



# FIGHT *by* FLIGHT

Why LEAVING Godless Places  
is LOVING Godless Places

JOEL WEBBON



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*To all the members of Covenant Bible Church who bravely  
moved across the country with me to plant a new church.*

*To my parents who sacrificially uprooted their  
lives to join us in this adventure.*

*To my father-in-law who set a  
righteous example for both how and why Christians should  
leave godless places like California.*

*And to my wife who, in her devotion to her husband, was  
willing to endure the loss of precious friendships  
in pursuit of a better future for our children.*

*“Tens of millions of God-fearing patriots live in places where they have no hope of making their citizenship count. By good citizens living in places where it is not rewarded by the state, they are subsidizing the very demonic Spirit of the Age that inhabits where they live. Why? They can't all possibly be missionaries. For those who are, let us support their mission. But what is everyone else's excuse? At this tipping point moment, it is time for us to assess all of our tactics and options. This book does exactly that.”*

**Steve Deace**

**Best-selling author, Blaze TV host**

*“Not all retreats are created equally. Some retreats are pure cowardice. This is where you stick your tail between your legs, run off, and hope that the conflict never finds your hiding place. Other retreats are strategic. This is where you pull back to a defensible position, gain your bearings, and go right back after it with renewed vigor. This book is about the latter. It's a guide for fighters.”*

**Michael Foster**

**It's Good To Be A Man author, East River Church pastor**

*“The question of how Christians should order their lives in an increasingly hostile culture so as to minimize and perhaps drive back some of that hostility is a pressing one. As a pastor who left arguably the most godless state in the nation, Joel Webbon has provided a persuasive and helpful argument for strategically retreating from dark places. This short book is full of biblical wisdom that demands consideration.”*

**Megan Basham**  
**The Daily Wire journalist**

*As someone who recently immigrated from my beloved Canada to America for the sake of my family, I'm especially grateful for this book. My friend Joel Webbon has written a timely book on an increasingly common issue for Christians living in alarmingly hostile places. I'm confident that this book will be a blessing to you.”*

**Samuel Sey**  
**Slow To Write**



*“Joel Webbon demonstrates a pastor’s heart and leader’s insight for his congregation and nation. His challenging call to “flee godless places” emerges from personal experience, and he forthrightly acknowledges his own errors in pursuing the “California dream.” However, his bold and biblical strategy is grounded in a recognition of what Western culture desperately needs: strong families and households; faithful churches that do not neglect meeting together; and godly government at every level, beginning close to home and spreading out from there. Consider his case for the kingdom of heaven’s sake!”*

**Dr. Joseph Boot**

**The Mission of God author, Ezra Institute founder**

*“Where you live matters. When Christians begin to think biblically, strategically, and multi-generationally about where they call home, the Church can gain significant ground in critical locations across the world. In short, God has something to say about why we move and where we move – Joel Webbon demonstrates this truth with incredible precision.”*

**Dale Partridge**

**The Manliness of Christ author, Relearn.org founder**





## **Our Ministry**

Right Response Ministries exists to cultivate  
right love for God in people's hearts  
by providing right knowledge of God  
for people's minds.



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# FOREWORD







## FOREWORD

If America was a deck of cards, then the year 2020 was the year that God decided that it was time to shuffle the deck. That was the year when many things that we previously thought were entirely settled manifested themselves as anything but settled. Of course, God has a purpose in all of this—He wants that which cannot be unsettled to remain (Heb. 12:27-28).

One of the symptoms of this unsettledness has been the massive migrations that have begun, migrations away from highly dysfunctional states and municipalities. If you are looking for ways to spend a highly instructive Saturday afternoon, I would invite you to go online and start comparing U-Haul rates between places like Portland and Boise, or Los Angeles and Dallas, or Chicago and Oklahoma City. Because U-Haul doesn't like it when half of the round trip is empty, they have to charge a lot more to go from Portland to Boise than to go the other way.

Another way of putting this is that many of our broken places are emptying out. Christians are obviously included in these movements, and in this small book, Pastor Joel Webbon provides some guidance for Christians who are working through the

issue. Leaving a place like California need not be an instance of “deserting your post.” It is possible to fight for the future of California by going to live in Texas.

These issues are most relevant. I serve as a pastor in Idaho, an attractive “destination state,” and in the past few years, we have welcomed scores of families into our fellowship from all over the country. And there are times when this is just what Jesus would have you do. “But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another . . .” (Matthew 10:23 KJV).

I commend this book to you for your careful consideration.

**Douglas Wilson**  
**Christ Church**  
**Moscow, Idaho**





*Chapter Zero*

# INTRODUCTION





## INTRODUCTION

**S**ome of you may be asking, “Why an entire book (albeit a short book) dedicated to the topic of Christians living in blue states? Why devote so much time to this particular topic, especially a niche topic that's likely to be polarizing?” These are fair questions and so I will do my best to address them in this introduction.

Although it may be reasonable to categorize Christians living in a state such as California as a niche topic, it should be recognized that we're talking about a pretty big niche. According to multiple studies, approximately 16 million people in California identify as Christian. This massive number accounts for about 10% of the total number of professing Christians in our nation. Therefore, a serious discussion regarding the spiritual, practical, and financial well-being of a tenth of America's Christians seems more than prudent. Are these Christians in spiritual danger? Are they living in a context where they can thrive and raise godly offspring?



Will they be able to exercise wise and careful stewardship of the resources God has given them, or will large amounts of these resources be siphoned away from their families and local churches into state taxes and high costs of living? Christians may disagree on the answers to these questions, but all Christians should agree that these questions matter.

A second reason why I have decided to devote so much time and energy to this topic is that I lived in California for over a decade and pastored there faithfully for approximately seven years. During my pastoral tenure, I frequently sought to persuade Christians to stay in California, and more particularly, to stay in San Diego where our church was located. In some cases, there were no discernible harmful effects. In other cases, there were. Many people postponed marriage, children, or buying a home due to my continual insistence that our church in San Diego desperately needed people to stay. For the record, the choice to postpone building godly households was not exclusively due to the practical challenges of living in California. Prolonging singleness, postponing children, and mismanagement of financial resources all appear to be symptoms of a nationwide phenomenon among young people today. The most likely culprit is a poisonous brew of idolatry, perpetuated by a host of unbiblical views regarding God's design for the family. Still, the unique challenges of living in expensive and liberal states/cities only exasperate the problem.

In short, since I spent several years of my life compelling Christians to stay in California, it seems only right to devote some time and energy to righting my past wrongs. This is not some kind of gospel-less penance. Rather, the Scripture teaches that each of us should strive to do good works in keeping with our repentance (Matthew 3:8). That said, I recognize that I must be careful not to make the same mistake, only this time, in the other direction. Therefore, my desire is for Christians to seriously consider whether or not their choice to remain in hostile contexts will inhibit them from full obedience to all of Christ's commands. I want these Christians to know that it is permissible, and in some cases even commendable, to leave. At the same time, I want Christians to know there are exceptions to the rule. In some cases it is permissible, and even right, to stay.

To this end, this small book is intended to serve as merely the kindling for the fire of serious thought, prayer, and discussion. Ultimately, the decision is up to you, your conscience, and the Lord.



*Chapter One*

THE CALIFORNIA  
DREAM

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## A GOSPEL-LESS RITE OF PASSAGE

**T**here once was a long-standing tradition held by the Maasai people of Kenya and Tanzania. When a young boy came of age, he would be sent out on a mission. His tribe expected him to kill a lion with nothing more than his wits and a spear. This was his rite of passage.

This was how the young boy would earn the approval of his tribe and prove that he was a man. The bigger the lion, the bigger the man. Although this tradition may seem foreign to us, I fear that something eerily similar is still happening here in America. The incessant need to prove our worth. A profound sense of emptiness that inspires foolish risks for the slightest chance of winning it all. For the Maasai boy, this rite of passage set him on a lonely path into the frightening jungle, far away from the safety of his village. Likewise, for countless young Americans, our craving for significance often drives us far away from our families and traditional upbringings to some of the most liberal and godless places on earth. The difference between these two phenomenons

is that for the Maasai boy to succeed in his endeavor, he had to embrace all that he had been taught. Only by utilizing his ancestors' traditions and practices would this young boy be able to stare down a lion and live to tell the tale. But in America, it is often by forsaking the rich traditions of our conservative upbringings that a few rare individuals achieve what has been called "the California Dream."

The California Dream is the psychological thrust to acquire quick wealth or fame in a new world. As a result of the California Gold Rush of 1848-1859, California became indelibly connected with the idea of sudden success in a distant land of opportunity. Over 150 years later, California's luster still hasn't worn off. A cursory glance at U-Haul's website should suffice in concluding that a move to California is a move in the wrong direction. And yet, despite all the warning signs, thousands of young Americans continue to pour into the Golden State each year. Very few achieve their dreams, but this is not the problem. The real problem is that many young Americans do succeed in the total forfeiture of their values, principles, and beliefs.

Some people move to California for Hollywood with dreams of making an appearance on the "big screen." Some people do it for Silicon Valley and the chance of becoming the next Steve Jobs. Others make the move with aspirations of saving the world by joining another one of the countless non-profits that promise to solve the next global crisis. But almost everyone who moves

to California does it to prove something. I did it for ministry. I did it to show all those chump pastors back in flyover country that I was capable of doing something great. Yes, I truly believe that God has called me to be a pastor. But it was my hunger for glory that caused me to go about fulfilling this calling in the wrong way. And it was this same hunger for glory that caused me to go about fulfilling my calling in the wrong place.

Through this journey, I have learned that I am not alone. I can smell this glory hunger on almost every young person I meet. California is swarming with them. They are frantically grasping for personal worth through a gospel-less rite of passage. Many of these people may even be Christians who possess a genuine desire to glorify God. But in the hidden recesses of almost every heart, there lurks a little boy (or little girl) still desperately trying to prove their worth by killing the biggest lion. What makes this so tragic is that it stands in direct opposition to the truth of the gospel. In the gospel story, there really is a lion. But this lion has already been slain. And believe it or not, you and I were the ones who accomplished this daring feat. However, we did not kill this lion with our gifts and talents. You and I killed this lion by our sin. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. And this Lion willingly chose to die so that we could freely share in his glory rather than striving for our own.



## THE MATH JUST DOESN'T ADD UP

In 2015, a study performed by Bankrate.com ranked San Diego (the city where I lived for over a decade) as the worst city in the United States to build wealth. Believe it or not, a similar study, conducted just a couple years ago, arrived at the same conclusion. Even the few cities in the country with higher costs of living (such as San Francisco and Washington, D. C.) still fared significantly better in this study. The study attributed its findings to one major factor: "San Diego's high home and rent prices compared to salaries leave residents unable to build equity." Now in case you missed it, this study was performed in 2015. Since that time, the average price of a home in San Diego has skyrocketed. In 2009, right after the housing market crash, the average cost of a home in San Diego County was approximately \$280k. By 2015, that price had gone up to \$460k. By June of 2019, the price had shot up even further to \$590k. By April of 2020 (less than a year later), the average cost of a home in San Diego County was hovering around \$630k. And in September 2021 the average price of a home in San Diego officially reached \$830k. To put all of this into perspective, if someone bought a home in San Diego today, currently spends about \$5,000/month (or more) on housing. This number merely reflects the cost of their mortgage plus utilities. It does not include repairs or any other costs associated with owning a home.

## A GUILT-RIDDEN PASTOR

There was no possible way for me to be able to afford to buy a home in San Diego on my salary from my church. For the record, the chief culprit for my low salary was not the greed of my congregation but the guilty conscience of their pastor. I cannot adequately express how guilty I constantly felt for encouraging people to stay in San Diego. But how would I ever succeed in planting a church if everyone got wise and decided to leave? And how could I ask the people I loved to stay if I wasn't willing to suffer with them?

The Bible teaches that a faithful pastor is worthy of a "livable" wage. And the primary pastor who labors in the task of preaching God's Word is deserving of even more honor (1 Timothy 5:18). However, I continually chose to forgo this right because virtually everyone else in our church was forfeiting a livable wage by remaining with me in San Diego, California. So yes, the Bible commends the principle of shepherds being reasonably compensated, but not to the financial detriment of their sheep (Hebrews 11:24-25).

In imitating the Good Shepherd, faithful shepherds are called to lead their sheep into "green pastures" and beside "still waters" (Psalm 23). However, in terms of geography, economics, and politics, San Diego is a desert. Deserts don't tend to provide much nourishment. So what do sheep eat in the middle of a

desert? In most cases, very little. And what does a shepherd end up eating if he is determined to keep his flock in such a barren place? The answer is simple – the sheep. I decided that I'd rather starve.

## FINALLY SEEING THE LIGHT

I believe that there is a profound difference between the “hired hand” who chooses to abandon the sheep (John 10:12-13) and a shepherd who lovingly attempts to persuade the sheep to follow him into greener pastures (Psalm 23). By the grace of God, I was able to convince 15 adults to accompany me from San Diego, California, to Georgetown, Texas, to plant Covenant Bible Church. However, a large portion of our church's members decided to stay behind. It is unreasonable for me to expect that every Christian will share my convictions. After all, God really does call some people to remain faithful in challenging places, to serve as a light in the midst of great darkness. But for many Christians in places like California, it is likely only a matter of time before they join the rest of the masses who are fleeing.





*Chapter Two*

**BIBLICAL MASCULINITY  
INCLUDES FLEEING**

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## A DESPERATE NEED FOR MEN

**I** regularly championed the cause of Christians being willing to sacrifice for the mission of Jesus. I passionately preached against the evils of the Prosperity Gospel (which truly is evil). Still, I foolishly conflated this health and wealth heresy with an honest desire to make enough money to start a family and purchase a modest home. Books like "Radical" by David Platt served as my inspiration.

But I failed to recognize how truly "radical" it is for a Christian man to marry a woman in his youth, remain faithful to her throughout his entire life, give her the blessing of children, and work hard to provide for them. In my assessment, the American Church has far too many men who are eager to go to third-world-countries as missionaries (including the up and coming third-world-country of California), but not nearly enough men who are willing to fight for this country by establishing godly households



and demonstrating faithfulness to their wives and children.

I'm now convinced that the vast majority of men in our churches don't need teaching about how to be pastors. Instead, they simply need to be taught how to be men. They need to be taught how to be husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers. I wasted far too much time engaging with the men in my previous church about peripheral doctrines and the prospects of pastoral ministry. And I invested far too little time talking about the fundamentals of what it means to be a Christian man. In this way, I failed these men. And in this way, I failed myself.

These days, young Christian men seem to have a lot in common with the Samaritan woman in John 4:16-20: "Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying you have no husband for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship..." When a pastor confronts young men in the church about matters of marriage and family, these men will often attempt to change the subject: "Sir, I perceive that you are a 'theologian.' Could you flesh out the specific details of supralapsarianism as it relates to the doctrine of limited atonement?" It is precisely at this point that a wise pastor will

respond by saying, "No. Let's talk about your family."

It is true that God calls some men to stand up in the pulpit as pastors, but not before these men learn how to stand up for their own wives and children as husbands and fathers. Biblical manhood in this country has been dying a slow and painful death for decades. When we emasculate Christ's Church by championing every feminine characteristic as though it were a virtue and demonizing every masculine trait as though it were a toxic vice, what else should we expect? Yes, we need more faithful pastors, but we won't get any until we have more faithful men: "For if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for the household of God?" (1 Timothy 3:5).

So what exactly does the Bible have to say about true masculinity? Perhaps the best place to start is by looking at some simple biblical commands. As we investigate these commands, I will attempt to demonstrate from my own circumstances how a plain reading of the Scripture was all it took to convince me to move.

## **MEN AS SONS**

Exodus 20:12 says, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." Although "obedience" to our parents is a temporary command issued to younger children while they remain at

home, the command to "honor" our fathers and mothers is a lifelong command that continues even for adult children. For quite some time, my parents were doing everything they could to transition from Bay City, Texas, to San Diego, California. They desperately wanted to be closer to their adult children and grandchildren (let's be honest, mainly the grandchildren). Although my parents were diligently trying their best to achieve this goal, it was doubtful that two individuals who had lived most of their adult lives in one of the poorest counties of Texas would be able to successfully retire in one of the most expensive cities in the world.

Over time, I became convinced that I had an obligation to help provide for my aging parents by ensuring that they were able to fulfill their hearts' desires. 1 Timothy 5:4 says, "But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God." Although this biblical text specifically references elderly widows, I have come to believe that it is pleasing in the sight of God when adult children earnestly seek to make "some return" to their parents, even when both their father and mother are still living.

## **MEN AS FATHERS**

Here is another biblical command: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it..." (Genesis 1:28). As

the Scripture testifies, children are most assuredly a blessing from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). And while I will maintain that Scripture allows for some measure of careful and ethical family planning (contraceptives that do not impose abortive risks), I am convinced that in most circumstances married couples do well to have several children (Psalm 127:5). However, procreation is merely one small portion of the task which the Lord has assigned to parents. In addition to producing children, a father must both protect and provide for his children. At the risk of being overly simplistic, you might say that every man needs a job (provision) and a gun (protection). Two things that California's politicians are working tirelessly to eradicate.

A significant component of this provision includes the children's education. "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). In light of biblical texts such as this, it appears evident that a Christian man cannot merely abdicate his fatherly duty by handing his children over to the secular state to be educated. This is especially true in a state like California. This means that a husband and wife will be required to home-school their children or pay a significant amount to place each of their children in a private Christian school. "And they brought [Jesus a denarius]. And he said to them, 'Whose image is this?' They said to him, 'Caesar's.' And Jesus said to them, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's'" (Mark 12:16-17). Still to this

day, the image on our currency is the image of man. But whose image do we see in our children? Surely, it is God's. So why do we keep handing our children over to Caesar (the state)? Why do Christian parents continue to insist that their 15 minutes of daily "family worship" will somehow be able to compete with the 15,000 hours of state indoctrination they willingly subject their children to? Ignorance is the answer for some parents, but for most, the answer is money. Enrolling our children in a private Christian school is expensive. And a father's choice to home-school his children means that he will not be able to rely on his wife to provide a second income. So how will parents who come under these biblical convictions continue to afford to live in a state like California without succumbing to the temptation to utilize public schools? The answer is simple – they probably won't.

## **MEN AS GRANDFATHERS**

Furthermore, Proverbs 13:22 says, "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous." If God would be so kind as to provide me with the necessary grace, I long to be a "good" man in accordance with this text. And although I recognize that the inheritance mentioned explicitly in this text contains far more than material wealth, indeed, it cannot contain less. Therefore, a Christian man must be thoroughly committed to diligently planning for the spiritual and financial future of both his children and grandchildren. What opportunities will his sons have for

work when they grow up. Who will his granddaughters marry when they come of age? Christian men are obligated to consider these kinds of questions with abundance of care.

## **MEN AS HUSBANDS**

Further still, Titus 2:3-4 says, "Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train younger women to love their husbands and children... working at home." Although I do not believe it is inherently immoral for women with children to work outside of their homes in some capacity, I have determined that as the Lord increases my household and our oldest child reaches schooling age, I want to do everything I can to allow my wife to devote more of her time to the godly work at home which the Lord has called her to. By God's grace, my wife is now officially in our home full-time.

## **MEN AS CHURCH MEMBERS**

In addition to all these commands, Malachi 3:10 says, "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you such a blessing until there is no more need." There are plenty of Christians today who would reject the idea that the tithe is a continued requirement for New Testament believers.

Instead, these individuals tend to promote the concept of what is often referred to as "Gospel-Giving." What seems odd to me is that, in practical terms, Gospel-Giving regularly appears to produce less cash in the offering plate than what we might call "Law-Giving" (AKA: a biblical tithe of 10%). So why do so many Christians (especially in places like California) seem content to forfeit such a massive portion of their hard-earned income to the state while often failing to give an even smaller portion to the church? This reluctance to generosity undoubtedly reveals an issue of the heart (2 Corinthians 9:7). Still, perhaps this reluctance also demonstrates the practical challenges associated with high costs of living and exorbitant state taxes.

## **THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF BIBLICAL MANHOOD**

One common denominator for all these biblical commands is money. Although the Scripture regularly commends the poor, it is naive to pretend as though there are no financial implications to our obedience to Christ. Certainly, it is possible to be faithful in obedience while possessing only meager means. However, there is a notable difference between the Christian man trapped in North Korea who is doing the best he can and the Christian man who willingly remains in California at the cost of faithful stewardship. "To one [the master] gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once

and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money" (Matthew 25:15-18). Just because a man can financially survive in California doesn't necessarily mean he should. After all, the duty of a Christian is not merely to ensure that he does not lose what rightfully belongs to his master. Instead, a Christian is called to multiply what belongs to his master to the best of his ability.

So to summarize all these biblical commands, a Christian man is called by God to care for his aging parents, produce multiple offspring, provide a distinctly Christian education for each of his children, ensure that his wife is permitted to work with the children at home, lay up an inheritance for both his children and his grandchildren, and accomplish all of this on 90% of his income (and undoubtedly far less, due to further generosity to those in need and his civic duty to pay taxes to the state). As Ted Cruz would say, "Try doing that in California."





*Chapter Three*

THE EXCEPTION IS  
NOT THE NORM

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## TWO TYPES OF SACRIFICE

**T**he Bible speaks of two primary types of sacrifice: gospel sacrifice and sinful sacrifice. Gospel sacrifice involves a conscious decision to forgo our own personal comforts and pleasures in order to advance God's mission here on earth. In contrast, sinful sacrifice involves a conscious (or even subconscious) decision to forgo obedience to God's clear commandments in order to "allegedly" advance God's mission here on earth.

"And Saul said to Samuel, 'I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord has sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, the sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.' Then Samuel said, 'Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,

as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the Word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king" (1 Samuel 15:20-23). Indeed, obedience is better than sacrifice. Again, gospel sacrifice (forgoing personal comforts and pleasures) is both permissible and even beautiful. But sinful sacrifice (forgoing obedience to Christ's commands) is displeasing to the Lord.

In my pastoral experience in California, I witnessed two groups of people. The first group consisted of those who lived in the city of San Diego and faithfully participated in our church for a relatively short time (usually 2-4 years). Almost all of the individuals in this first group were either college students or military. After their brief stint in California, most of these individuals would quickly move somewhere else in the country.

The second group consisted of those who resolved to live in the city long-term. Unfortunately, many of these individuals only lasted in the city by engaging in what I have now come to recognize as sinful sacrifice. I, myself, would be included among them. In other words, we weren't making it in San Diego due to a supernatural gift of contentment, living on one income in tiny apartments with our multiple children who were being faithfully home-schooled by their mothers. Instead, we were surviving in San Diego because many of the men in our church were waiting

until their 30's to get married. Even the men who did marry at a younger age were often waiting five years (or longer) to begin having children. In addition to this, almost all of our wives worked in a relatively large capacity outside of the home, not because they wanted to but because they had to for us to survive.

## **BUT WHAT ABOUT MISSIONARIES?**

Some of you may be wondering, "What about Christians who live in places that California so greatly aspires to become? You know, places such as Venezuela, North Korea, or China?" This is a perfectly reasonable question that deserves a thoughtful response. To determine whether or not a Christian should choose to live in California, we must recognize that countries such as Venezuela, North Korea, and China differ from California in at least one key respect: The vast majority of Christians living under these oppressive regimes do not have the option of leaving! In God's providence, he determines both when and where people will live. For much of human history (and still even today), many people have very little say in the matter. However, as citizens of the United States of America (as well as citizens of other first-world countries), we have unparalleled freedom in determining where to raise a family.

A further inquiry might be this: "But what about the concept of missionaries? What about those who choose to forsake their liberties to go into the darkest places of our world and make

disciples for Jesus?" To this, I will respond by simply reminding the reader of what a missionary is.

A missionary is someone who is committed to fulfilling the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). We tend to forget that last part. The Great Commission involves more than merely conversions and baptisms. It involves discipleship. Fortunately, Jesus was kind enough not to leave the task of defining discipleship up to us. So what is discipleship according to Jesus? Discipleship is teaching those who we baptize into the name of the Triune God to obey all of Christ's commands. So missionaries (and all Christians for that matter) have been tasked with teaching others how to submit to the complete Lordship of Jesus in every area of life.

So how do we teach people about the goodness of Christ's Lordship over the family if we deliberately prolong our singleness, delay childbearing, and abdicate our parental duties by shipping our children off to the state so that our wives can provide a second income to cover the high cost of living? We don't. Are there some Christians who are spiritually and financially fit for being missionaries in California? Certainly. Just as there are some Christians who are fit to be missionaries in a place like China. But to pretend that this is the norm simply because what I'm

suggesting is controversial is incredibly foolish.

## PLAYING THE LONG GAME

By God's grace, I had the privilege of baptizing over 100 people during my pastoral service in San Diego, California. But over the years, I have come to desire more than merely planting churches and baptizing converts. Please don't misunderstand me. I never want anything less than this. I have simply grown to desire something more. When I moved from Texas to California, my only aspiration was to plant a church and see people come to saving faith in Jesus. In part, this was due to my specific theological convictions. At the time, I was not even aware that I held to such doctrines. But these doctrines were there, all the same, influencing every decision I made.

For instance, I assumed that Jesus (who would likely come back at any moment) had decreed that everything in this world would continually spiral out of control until he returned. I also assumed that the only thing of any eternal value was preaching the gospel and saving lost souls. Aspirations of founding schools, starting businesses, or running for local political office all seemed like worldly and carnal endeavors. Sure, these things may have provided some benefit to Christians and society at large. Still, I assumed that the value would likely be short-lived. After all, I had been taught that even such atrocities as abortion would never actually end by legislation but only by



heart transformation. And for anyone who may be skeptical of that statement's legitimacy, allow me to point out that the words "legislation" and "transformation" rhyme, so it must be true. I never stopped to wonder why there are approximately 1,000,000 abortions in America each year before the overturning of Roe, but only about 16,000 homicides. Apparently, legislation does matter. As it turns out, people tend to gravitate toward whatever option of murder happens to be legal. Yes, we want to see hearts genuinely changed by the power of the gospel. But throughout human history, deterring outward manifestations of wickedness (even in the case of unbelievers) through "the Second Use of God's Law" has also proven to be quite useful.

Suppose all we are called to do is plant churches and preach the gospel. Why not commit to exclusively doing this in the most challenging places in the world where the gospel appears to be needed the most? Heck, why settle with a place like California? If we were really serious about following Jesus, we would all move to North Korea. On the other hand, if it's possible that Jesus might tarry for a few thousand more years, and if he intends to restore this world (instead of merely throwing it all away and completely starting over), then there may be some merit to the idea of a tactical and temporary retreat. Perhaps, Christians would be wise to momentarily fall back from behind enemy lines to rebuild and regroup for a generation or two.

## BUT WHAT ABOUT JOHN MACARTHUR?

A common objection I've received is this: But what about John MacArthur? There are few pastors who have served more faithfully than John MacArthur. And as you probably know, MacArthur has spent over 50 years ministering in none other than the deep blue state of California. For many, MacArthur is basically viewed as the Protestant Pope. You'd be hard-pressed to find a more respected man. In other words, if MacArthur has been able to faithfully minister in California for so many years, why can't others?

The answer is quite simple. John MacArthur was born in 1939, and he began pastoring Grace Community Church in 1969. Ronald Reagan was the Governor of California when John MacArthur first became a pastor. In short, California was a completely different world. Over these past few years, as Governor Gavin Newsom was locking people in their homes while lavishly dining at The French Laundry, MacArthur was prayerfully determining where to faithfully finish his race. As I'm writing this, John is currently 83 years old. He just finished preaching at his world-renowned Shepherd's Conference, and quite frankly, I'd be surprised (albeit, pleasantly surprised) if we see him preaching at next year's conference. Again, MacArthur is now finishing his race. But for the average person reading this book, it is likely that you are determining where to start your race. There is a dynamic difference between these two decisions.

## FIGHT BY FLIGHT

We often speak of the choice between "fight" or "flight." But what if it were possible to do both? What if it were possible to fight "by" flight? In 2020, The Daily Wire decided to move out of Los Angeles and relocate to Nashville, Tennessee. What if Christians chose to follow their example? What if collectively, we had the power to bring an entire state like California to its knees? I am confident that Ben Shapiro did not choose to leave L.A. because he simply gave up the fight. He was born and raised in L.A. and has spoken on several occasions of his deep love for the city. Ben and his team at The Daily Wire remain as committed as ever to winning the culture war. The only difference is that they have come to believe that they might achieve better results if they continue the fight from a more strategic position. They're not choosing to flee as a substitute for fighting. They simply realized, along with countless others, that there is a legitimate third option: The option of fight "by" flight.

While we're on this point, there appears to be a powerful lesson in the parable of the prodigal son, found in Luke 15:14-17: "And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired

servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!" Did you catch that? "No one gave him anything." And what immediately happened next? The passage says that "he came to his senses." One of the worst things that could have occurred for this rebellious young man would have been if a member of his father's household had tracked him down and given him a handout. Only when the prodigal experienced the consequences of his choices did he decide to make a change. So although some Christians may be called to stay, the vast majority of Christians need to stop propping up godless states at the expense of their own families. We need to stop supplying handouts to the prodigal son. Let's allow this rebellious teenager to eat a little pig food for a while. Perhaps God will grant the gift of repentance and permit places like California to come to their senses.

## **IT'S NOT ONLY "HOW" YOU VOTE, BUT "WHERE" YOU VOTE**

The 2020 Presidential Election was a landmark moment in American history. The election, which saw Joe Biden emerge victorious, was one of the most hotly contested in the country's history.

Donald J. Trump's impact on American society, despite his polarizing personality and rhetoric, cannot be understated. During his presidency, he appointed 234 judges, politicians, and lawyers for federal judgeships, with three of these appointments reaching

the Supreme Court. These appointments had a lasting impact on American society, including the overturning of the landmark case of *Roe v. Wade*. Regardless of how you feel about Trump, there are children alive today that would have been murdered in their mother's womb if he had not been elected President in 2016. It really is that simple.

Now, at the risk of over speculating, what would have happened if Donald Trump had been reelected in November of 2020? For starters, Trump would have taken a completely different approach towards the energy crisis and the use of fossil fuels. Biden's regulations on drilling and fracking have done little more than contribute to massive inflation, both in America and on the global stage. A Trump presidency also might have eliminated the threat of nuclear war between Russia, Ukraine, and other European nations. And of course, the debacle in Afghanistan, resulting in the loss of 13 U.S. service members, could have been easily prevented. In short, the whole world could have been a safer and more prosperous place.

However, my purpose in bringing up the 2020 Presidential Election is not merely to discuss the importance of "how" one votes, but "where" one votes. Biden, who won six key battleground states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin), defeated Trump, who only won three (Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio). And yet, if Trump had won just four of Biden's six battleground states, he would have secured

enough electoral college votes to win the presidency, despite still losing the popular vote by a significant margin (with the help of some funny business, I have no doubt). Although Trump lost the popular vote by approximately 10 million, he actually only needed 76,514 votes to win. The key is where these votes are cast. 76,514 votes, cast respectively in Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, and Wisconsin, would have been sufficient to provide Trump with the electoral advantage.

Now here's the important question for the purpose of our discussion: How many votes did Trump get in the state of California? The answer is approximately 6 million. And was Trump close to winning this state? Not even remotely. Biden received twice as many votes in California as Trump did (approximately 12 million). In other words, 6 million conservatives/Christians in California flushed their vote down the "electoral toilet." And to my shame, I must admit that I was one of them, since my family and I did not leave the state until December 2020.

Just think about that for a moment. If less than 100,000 conservatives/Christians living in California had moved to Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, or Wisconsin before the 2020 election, the whole world might look different. 6 million votes for Trump in California, and all we needed was 76,514 (less than 1 and a half percent). With all the rhetoric we've had to endure these past few years about the importance of "loving our

neighbors,” I can't help but wonder how many of our neighbors (both in America and across the world) would be in an objectively better position if just a few Christians in California would have been willing to give up their dream of living by the beach.

It's too late to go back. What's done is done. Biden is President (well, someone using Biden as a puppet is President). Either way, all we can do is move forward. Christians, such as myself, missed a golden opportunity to move out of godless places to impact the world for the better. However, the principle of thinking strategically about where we choose to live is timeless. Progressive cities, states, and countries have been much like the proverbial pot of gradually heated water. The frog inside is eventually boiled alive because it never seems to notice the subtle changes in temperature. In many ways, I thank the Lord for the crazy events of 2020. In his merciful providence, God caused the temperature to spike in such a way that hundreds of thousands of Christians have finally taken the hint.







*Chapter Four*

**AN EPIC FAIL FOR  
AMERICA'S PASTORS**

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## WE SHOULD HAVE SEEN IT COMING

**I**t was already hard enough for a Christian to survive in a blue state under normal circumstances, but the difficulty dramatically increased in 2020. Virtually no one saw the Coronavirus coming, but faithful pastors certainly should have been able to predict what the general response to the virus would be. Sadly, this was not the case. It seems that every pastor in our nation was scrambling to learn in a matter of days/weeks what we all should have previously studied over the years/decades.

I remember spending dozens of hours arguing with one of my elders over how our local church should respond to the crisis. This particular elder was shockingly quick to believe the "scientific" models, including the more extreme prediction of 2.2 million deaths publicized by the London Imperial College. He even chastised me for possessing what he considered a "cavalier attitude" toward the virus. I suppose my attitude did seem cavalier

by comparison.

For the record, I never denied the reality (or even the significance) of the virus. I was simply able to look past the immediate panic to what I perceived as a much more significant threat. I was specifically concerned about the potential for government overreach in three specific areas: 1) religious freedom, 2) civic freedom, and 3) economic freedom. In my assessment, this particular elder failed to properly discern the times: "Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do..." (1 Chronicles 12:32).

To be fair, my elder's reaction to the virus was not unusual among our nation's pastors. On the contrary, I think it's fair to say that his reaction represented the norm. Millions in our nation have taken their liberty for granted, insisting that the United States of America is nothing more than a symbol of systematic racism and global oppression. In addition to this, many Evangelicals have long tolerated a misguided and anemic "ecclesiology" (the doctrine of the church). Pastors rarely preach about the spiritual significance of regular church attendance, much less the importance of formal church membership. Many churches were live-streaming their services long before social distancing and masks ever came into play. For many Christians, Covid-19 merely provided them with a justifiable excuse to further neglect their local churches. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that America's pastors hastily shut their churches'

doors and were reluctant to open them back up.

## THE MYTH OF NEUTRALITY

It is of the utmost importance that we remind ourselves that although we should resist the temptation of politicizing everything, everything is still being politicized by someone. Christians must exercise careful discernment as we swim through the sea of information provided by secular sources. Do Christians hold to the doctrine of "common grace?" Yes. By borrowing from the Christian worldview, can an atheist make certain discoveries that are undeniably true? Yes. However, as Christians, we must also recognize that every man has an allegiance: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:30). In other words, Christians must better familiarize themselves with "the myth of neutrality."

A few years ago, I was profoundly challenged by a small book that presented a concise rebuttal to the "two-kingdom theology" espoused by many theologians today. In this book, the author pushed back on a particular two-kingdom theologian's assertion that there is nothing moral or theological about making stir-fry. The author did this by providing examples of certain cannibalistic tribes who would fry their victims' flesh with vegetables in a pan. Apparently, even stir-fry cooks are influenced by their spiritual allegiance.

This concept of the myth of neutrality encompasses everything, even the collection and presentation of data. When we read studies, which promote themselves as politically neutral and strictly "following the science," we should do so with a certain degree of holy suspicion. This is because we are reading nothing less than the findings of an individual who is radically influenced by his/her worldview (even if only subconsciously). Everyone holds to certain presuppositions. As Hillary Clinton infamously said, "Never let a 'good' crisis go to waste." Crisis is key for the political left in our nation because individual liberty always seems to get in the way of progressive political agendas. So how does the political left find its way around those pesky provisions outlined in our nation's Constitution? They incessantly search for ways to convince the masses to trade their liberty for something else. It's a classic bait and switch maneuver. And almost nothing has served as more enticing "bait" than public safety.

Personal liberty for the mere allusion of public safety. A terrible trade, to be sure, but a decision that the general public has been willing to make time and time again. In the '70s, it was global cooling (you probably forgot about that one). In the '80s, it was global warming. Later, this evolved into climate change. And then (as if right on schedule), our politicians informed the public that we are now entering into a climate "crisis." Due to this claim, the Democrats insisted on slipping elements of the "Green New Deal" into the relief package for Covid-19. Again, crisis is key for any political leader that yearns for more power. However, for this

"crisis strategy" to work, the ruling elites must somehow convince the general public that the crisis actually exists. This task requires at least two primary institutions: academia and the media.

If any two spheres have been completely monopolized by the political left in our nation, they are undoubtedly the spheres of academia and media. The left owns our nation's universities (Harvard, Yale, Oxford, etc.) and rules them with an iron fist. Therefore, if we genuinely believe that neutrality is a myth and that our theology and morality influence every facet of our lives, we must commit to exercising careful discernment as we read any "academic" report. Again, the political left dominates not only universities but also the media. Universities do the research, and the media presents their findings. Godless Yale and the godless New York Times, working in perfect concert. Once more, can unbelievers contribute in helpful ways due to the fact that all people have been created in the image of God? Absolutely. So as Christians, there are many times when we should be willing to read these reports. I am merely advocating that we read them as Christians.

There appear to be at least two common pitfalls for Christians during times of uncertainty. First, Christians can ignore the worst possible outcomes without credible reasoning simply because we can't stomach the results. This is denial. While possessing the vaneer of courage, denial is little more than a subtle form of fear. Second, we can believe everything we hear without an ounce of



suspicion. Our secular universities and left political media have overplayed virtually every "crisis" there has ever been, often pulling crises out of thin air. It behooves us to remember that these are the same people who assured us that everyone would be dead by now if we did not begin using solar panels and driving electric cars. Therefore, Christians need courage so that we do not give in to the temptation of baseless denial. And yet, Christians also require courage so that we stop immediately forfeiting all of our God-given rights every time we hear a negative report, simply because it flies under the banner of "science." "But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, 'Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.' Then the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.' So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, 'The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height'" (Numbers 13:30-32).

## FREEDOMS VERSUS COSTS

According to Jesus, there is a cost to being his disciple. "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?" (Luke 14:27-28). However, also according to Jesus, discipleship appears to be the only means of securing real

and lasting freedom. "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34-36). In Christian terms, the price of freedom is being a disciple of Jesus. And being a disciple of Jesus comes with a cost. Simply put, even Jesus testifies that there is a cost to freedom.

I have often heard it said, "Liberals think in terms of solutions; conservatives think in terms of costs." The American people live every day (even if only subconsciously), acknowledging that there is a cost to our freedoms. Every year in our nation, 35,000 people die due to car accidents (a million globally). And this does not account for all the horrible injuries which take place at an even higher rate. Regardless, we determine each year that the cost of 35,000 lives is worth paying for our freedom to drive. And as it relates to Covid-19, it's worth remembering that every time we get behind the wheel of a car, we take not only our own life into our hands but the lives of every other driver that we pass by on the road that day.

So what cost should Christians be willing to pay for the freedom of churches to worship with the saints on the Lord's Day, the freedom of fathers to provide for their wives and children, and the freedom of citizens to safeguard against dangerous amounts of civil power being accrued by the pagan state? Before you answer, please remember that the minivan in your driveway serves as

proof that you've already given your consent to the cost of 35,000 American lives (annually) in exchange for the freedom to drive. As the American people, we have always been willing to pay certain costs for the sake of our liberties. Therefore, it is naive (and even hypocritical) to accuse someone of being a "grandma-killer" (unless that someone happens to be Andrew Cuomo) merely because they were willing to consider the costs of lifting the bans imposed by certain states. Therefore, the statement, "Any amount of freedom is worth forfeiting to save even one life," is an empty sentiment that no one believes (including the lying politicians who said it repeatedly).

These kinds of issues present a challenge for all United States citizens (as well as citizens of all other nations around the globe), but not to the same degree. Governors such as Ron Desantis in Florida rightly prioritized the value of individual liberty over the perception of public safety. Meanwhile, governors like Gavin Newsom in California (a modern tyrant) monopolized every ounce of public panic in an attempt to gain more political power. Again, liberals think in terms of solutions; conservatives think in terms of costs. It has been said many times, "If a person is not a liberal when they are young, they do not have a heart. And if a person is not a conservative when they are old, they do not have a head." This "empathy-loving" generation of Americans certainly appears to possess mushy hearts. But tragically, they appear to possess even mushier brains.





*Chapter Five*

**DO WE REALLY BELIEVE  
CHURCH IS “ESSENTIAL”?**

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## CHURCH IS ESSENTIAL

**A**llow me to be abundantly clear. I firmly believe with every fiber of my being that the church (not merely individual believers themselves, but the gathered assembly of these believers on the Lord's Day) is absolutely "essential." However, this statement is not meant to convey that I believe the church's gathering to be essential under any circumstances.

For instance, when I was pastoring in San Diego, if the mayor had announced on a Saturday evening that a tsunami of biblical proportions was headed straight for the city and that anyone who remained within the city limits would be wiped out entirely, I would have immediately canceled our Lord's Day Gathering (assuming, of course, that our mayor was telling the truth).

An important detail to take note of in this scenario is that, under these circumstances, the government would deem all other



institutions and activities as "non-essential" (grocery stores, restaurants, parks, abortion clinics, marijuana dispensaries, and "mostly-peaceful" BLM riots). However, in the case of Covid-19, churches were deemed by the civil authorities as "non-essential," while other establishments and activities were considered "essential." To our shame, many Christians in our nation have been entirely content to miss several Sunday gatherings for a whole host of lesser reasons (vacation, sports, travel, etc.). If a person is comfortable with missing multiple Lord's Day Gatherings for such petty reasons, certainly they would struggle to understand why pastors (such as myself) chose to make such a big deal about canceling church in the middle of a "pandemic."

## CHURCH IS UNIQUE

However, even among Christians who are convinced that the saints' weekly gathering is "essential," many remain suspicious of its genuine "necessity." This suspicion is likely because many Christians fail to understand how the church is "unique." In our day, there appears to be an alarming amount of Christians who are simply unaware of what actually occurs in the gathered assembly of the saints on the Lord's Day. They fail to see how what takes place at church is categorically distinct from what individual Christians do all week long in their private practices of piety (scripture reading, prayer, fasting, catechizing their children, etc.). Therefore, pastors must labor to teach their

congregations that when we come together on the Lord's Day, we do not merely experience the heightened benefits of individual Christian practices due to the reality of being surrounded by other brothers and sisters in Christ. Instead, what takes place in the gathered assembly is a spiritual reality that occurs in no other earthly context.

According to Scripture, when "true churches" (orthodox churches which faithfully proclaim the gospel message) gather together on the Lord's Day and rightly administer "the ordinary means of grace" (publicly preaching the Word, publicly praying the Word, corporately singing the Word, and corporately "seeing" the Word in the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism), Christ himself begins to walk among the "lampstands" (the lampstands represent the churches themselves) and holds the "angels" of these churches in his right hand (the angels represent the gospel-ministers who have been tasked with the faithful proclamation of God's Word). And as these "angels" begin to preach, a "double-edged sword" is extended from the mouth of Christ himself, which begins to pierce the hearts of men (Revelation 1:10-16).

Since some of you may not appreciate my exegesis of the book of Revelation, allow me to present another biblical case from Matthew 18:17-20: "If [the impenitent church member currently under formal church discipline] refuses to listen to [the two or three witnesses who have confronted him], tell it to the

[the gathered assembly on the Lord's Day]. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (as an outsider, no longer considered to be a brother in Christ). Truly, I say to you, whatever [the gathered assembly of the church] binds on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name (wherever a true church exists and is assembled), there am I among them." According to Jesus, the minimal requirement for constituting a "true church" is the presence of two or three baptized believers who have made a public and credible profession of their faith, and who have covenanted with one another to follow all of Christ's commands while teaching others to do likewise. And when true churches "gather in [Jesus'] name, there [is Christ] among them." In other words, Christ, who is always present with believers by virtue of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit, promises to be "uniquely" present only in the context of the gathered church.

So when the saints physically gather with one another in worship on the Lord's Day, they are doing nothing less than coming together to meet with the Risen Lord. And not only are we gathering to "meet" with Christ, but we are gathering to offer him our worship and receive from him a "word." Matthew 4:1-4 says, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty

nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But Jesus answered, 'It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" According to Jesus, if physical bread (grocery stores) is deemed essential, Christians should consider spiritual bread (every "word" that comes from the mouth of God) as even more essential.

Now, it is true that Christians have been granted the immense privilege of receiving a "word from the mouth of God" in the context of our private Scripture reading. However, as we have already seen in Revelation 1:10-16, there is a specific "word" ("a double-edged sword") which "comes from the mouth of God" (out of "the mouth of Christ") when the "lampstand" is lit (the church is gathered) and "Christ begins to walk amidst the lampstands" (Jesus is spiritually present with the church in a unique way). When Jesus says to Satan in the wilderness that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God," he does not specify which "word" he is referring to (the "word" received in our private study of the Scripture, or the "word" received in the public preaching of the Scripture). Therefore, it is both reasonable and prudent for Christians to assume that both of these "words" are vital for sustaining our souls.

So for Christians to spiritually survive, much less spiritually

thrive, we cannot merely be diligent in studying and meditating upon God's Word privately. Additionally, we must joyfully receive God's Word as it is publicly proclaimed in the assembly of the saints on the Lord's Day: "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you... I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:27-35). If Christ himself is the true bread of life which all Christians desperately need to survive spiritually, and Christ promises to be present in a unique way when the church gathers together (Matthew 18:20), then certainly followers of Jesus must consider this gathering as both "essential" and "unique."

## WHAT WAS AT STAKE

Allow me to offer one final thought on this subject before moving on. Those who maintained that churches should continue to physically gather together during the pandemic were often relentless in citing Hebrews 10:24-25: "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some..." Although I wholeheartedly agree that this text applied to the situation, I simply wish that more Christians had been better equipped to explain why it is so vital for believers to obey this particular command.

Hebrews 3:12-13 says, “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another... that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” So Hebrews 10:24-25, when properly placed in context with Hebrews 3:12-13, provides both a biblical and logical explanation for the tragedy of apostasy (how some individuals who once belonged to the “visible” church ultimately chose to abandon the faith). By way of implication, Hebrews 10:24-25 informs us that the weekly gathering of the saints is the primary context for “stir[ring] up one another to love and good works.” And Hebrews 3:12-13 informs us that “exhort[ing] one another” (the phrase “exhort one another” is synonymous with the phrase “stir one another up”) is one of the church’s most effective strategies for guarding its members against being “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” which eventually causes people “to fall away from the living God” (commit apostasy). In other words, Christians are commanded not to neglect the weekly gathering of the saints because this is the necessary environment for fulfilling their Christian duty of stirring one another up. And stirring one another up (or exhorting one another) serves as a powerful defense against the deceitfulness of sin which facilitates a hardened, unbelieving heart. And finally, an unbelieving heart is what ultimately leads people to fall away from the living God.

In short, Christians (and especially pastors) were presented with a simple choice: Either forsake the gathering to minimize

the physical threat of death to our bodies (and even this basic premise was extremely suspect), or continue to gather to minimize the spiritual threat of damnation to our souls (this premise, however, is infallible).

Some overly zealous Calvinists might object at this point by insisting that God is sovereign over salvation, and therefore, he is capable of preserving the souls of his elect, even in the absence of physically gathering together on the Lord's Day. However, I might remind these Calvinists that the same God who is sovereign over salvation is sovereign over everything, and therefore, he is also quite capable of preserving the health of his people as they diligently seek to obey his commands.







*Chapter Six*

**A RIGHTEOUS  
REBELLION**

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## BUT WHAT ABOUT ROMANS 13?

**W**hen it comes to the Christian's duty to submit to the civil authorities, it is vital that we rightly interpret the whole of Scripture. First, it is crucial to recognize that Romans 13 (the biblical text that was so often cited for why churches should comply with every government regulation) says nothing explicitly about Christians being required by God to submit to unrighteous rulings handed down by tyrannical overlords.

Instead, Romans 13 merely describes God's good and holy purposes for civil governments, and therefore, the text assumes that Christians would do well to submit to these civil governments. But don't just take my word for it, let's take a moment and look at the text together.

“Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are

not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore, one must be in subjection..." (Romans 13:2-5). Notice, the text does NOT say, "Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do [whatever he says, whether morally right or wrong], and you will receive his approval, for he is [an autonomous agent working for his own benefit]." Instead, the text says, "Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good (that is, what is objectively good according to God's unchanging standard), and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant (that is, he works for God and is obligated to function within God's perimeters for civil authorities) for your good (that is, your true and lasting good in accordance with what God commands)." Unfortunately, Romans 13 was frequently misused by cowardly pastors seeking to justify their sinful compliance with the state.

Having addressed Romans 13, it remains imperative for Christians to familiarize themselves with several other biblical texts on the subject of civil disobedience. Here are a few of the most notable examples: Exodus 1:16-17 says, "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthing-stool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live. But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king

of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live." We can be sure that these Egyptian midwives' rebellion was righteous because the Scripture informs us that their decision to spare the Hebrew boys was rooted in their fear of God. Also, Rahab refused to report the Hebrew spies in holy defiance of Jericho's civil authorities (Joshua 2). Furthermore, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego rebelled against the king's edict when they were commanded to bow down and worship the king's golden image (Daniel 3). And in addition to this, we see that Daniel was also willing to rebel against the civil magistrate of his day. "All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions... When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously" (Daniel 6:7-10). When the king's decree forbade Daniel from continuing to act in obedience to his God, Daniel courageously chose to ignore it. And lastly, although more examples could undoubtedly be given, it is worth remembering that even the apostles chose to defy the Jewish Council (which served as both a religious and civil authority for the Jews at that time) when they were instructed not to preach in the name of Jesus any longer (Acts 5:27-29).

In Daniel's case, it is worth noting that he did not find it necessary to "throw any extra punches" toward the civil authorities of his day. However, notice that he was deliberate not to "pull any punches" either. Daniel was committed to praying three times a day with his windows opened toward Jerusalem because this practice was under God's covenant found in 1 Kings 8:27-30. Daniel's windows remained open due to the "substance" of his worship, not the "circumstances" of his worship. In 1 Kings 8:27-30, God promised to hear the prayers of his people (even if they were held captive in a distant land as Daniel was) if they would pray toward Jerusalem where his temple was constructed. As it pertains to the New Testament Church, the "substance" of our worship is preaching, praying, singing, and the sacraments. Christians cannot change these worship elements, but the "circumstances" of our worship may be altered. For example, gathering outdoors (while certainly not ideal) may modify the "circumstances" of our worship, but live-streaming our church's service changes the "substance" of worship. This is because the Bible clearly commands Christians to physically gather together (Hebrews 10:25).

## **WERE CHRISTIANS SPECIFICALLY TARGETED WITH COVID-19 POLICIES?**

Indeed, there are some distinctions between these biblical examples and the rulings that were issued by our own civil magistrate in light of Covid-19. Therefore, the task of those

who desire to be obedient to Scripture is to determine the proper biblical criteria for when it is both appropriate and necessary for Christians to rebel.

Some may be tempted to conclude from the previous biblical examples that the common denominator in each of these cases was that the people of God were specifically targeted. This is simply not true. In Daniel's case, the decree of King Darius made it illegal for anyone in all of his kingdom to pray to any "god" or petition any man. This decree oppressed those who worshiped the true God right along with everyone else. And in the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, it was the same. The decree of King Nebuchadnezzar affected everyone in the whole kingdom, even the pagans who worshiped false "gods." However, it is vital to recognize that Christians will often be affected more severely when governing authorities remove civil liberties. This is because we have been given clear commandments from God that must be obeyed. Whenever liberty is suppressed, Christians will uniquely suffer because Christians delight in the Law of God. And the Law of God is "the law of liberty" (James 1:25).

For example, in the case of King Nebuchadnezzar's decree, those who worshiped idols could simply add the king's statue to their list of false "gods." Most of these pagans were polytheists, and therefore, there was minimal conflict in submitting to the king's edict. However, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were committed to worshiping Yahweh alone. Their monotheistic



religion presented a significantly greater challenge.

In the New Testament Church of the first century, Domitian ruled as emperor over Rome. His cruelty rivaled that of Emperor Nero. Statues of him were sent all over the empire. On appointed days, feasts were held where the entire population was required to pass before the images of Domitian and bow down before him as "god." Once again, this was a blanket ruling that affected the Roman Empire's whole population. Still, Christians were the ones who most frequently lost their lives due to their unparalleled allegiance to Christ. Regarding the social restrictions against gatherings during Covid-19, although all Americans were affected, not all Americans possess an allegiance to Scripture, which commands that we gather for corporate worship on the Lord's Day.

A further problem with this view is that if the singling-out of Christians is the only valid criteria for righteously choosing to rebel, the civil authorities can simply do what they have always done throughout church history. They can pass a universal law that affects all people but harms Christians significantly more. And for Christians to have the "biblical" option of rebelling, we must then be able to somehow infallibly discern the hidden motives of all the governing officials involved. In the case of Daniel (as well as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego), malicious officials were serving as councilors to the king. These wicked officials worked tirelessly to influence the king to issue a foolish law that would

affect those who feared God in much more significant ways than those who did not. However, we only know these officials' wicked motives because it has been recorded for us in Scripture. In all fairness, although these laws were inspired by sinful officials who aimed at the persecution of godly men, these laws affected everyone. If anyone of any religion prayed to any "god," or even if an atheist petitioned any man, other than King Darius for 30 days, they would be thrown to the lions. There were likely many religious people at that time who urged one another to submit to the king's edict. Perhaps they said something like this: "The king has promised that the current restrictions against prayer will only last for 30 days. Surely, we should be patient during this season as we seek to humbly submit to those who are in positions of civil authority. Just 30 days to slow the spread!" Sound familiar?

Regarding our own civil magistrate's rulings, the reality is that we simply do not know what motives our officials had when they made their decisions surrounding Covid-19. Did the officials responsible for these decisions possess hidden motives against the people of God? We cannot say with absolute certainty either way, but it appears quite possible, especially in places like California. Therefore, it is both unbiblical and illogical to hold that Christians being definitively singled out is the only valid metric for rebelling against the civil magistrate.

## THE BIBLICAL CRITERIA FOR CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND GENUINE PERSECUTION

The clearest common denominator found in each of the biblical examples I've provided is this: Both men and women who feared the Lord righteously chose to rebel against their civil authorities whenever those officials required them to partake of something that God forbids or forsake something that God commands. So for Christians to "forsake the gathering" in a manner that is acceptable before God, there must be a biblical reason for doing so. And this biblical reason must be something more than repeatedly chanting Romans 13 as an incantation and then framing the most recent document signed by Joe Biden on your bedroom wall. Perhaps, the current challenges we are facing require a little bit more complex thought. Again, we must recognize that Romans 13 says nothing explicitly about submitting to governing officials when their decisions are not righteous. And it most assuredly says nothing about submitting to governing officials when their laws require us to directly disobey God.

Conversely, the perimeters I've just presented for cases of justifiable civil disobedience also serve as the perimeters for identifying genuine persecution from the state. Man does not get to determine the purpose, function, or authority of civil governments. God is the one who instituted the sphere of civil government, and therefore, God is the one who maintains

exclusive rights for determining the role of civil government. God's determination in this matter has been clearly communicated to us in Scripture (Romans 13, as well as a few other biblical texts). So whenever civil governments overstep their God-given jurisdiction, we have a legitimate case of civil tyranny that justifies civil disobedience. And whenever this civil disobedience is met with penalties from the state (regardless of the degree of severity), we have a genuine case of persecution. Certainly, some Christians throughout history have been persecuted more, while other Christians have been persecuted less. However, to claim that the experiences of pastors such as James Coates in Alberta, Canada, do not even qualify as legitimate persecution, reveals an alarming amount of ignorance and cruel indifference.

As a final note on this subject, we need to recognize that for those of us who are Christians in the United States of America, we are not subjects in a monarchy. Instead, we are citizens of a republic. We are not ultimately subject to a sovereign human official because the highest civil magistrate in our land is not a human official but a document: "The Constitution of the United States of America." Therefore, a reasonable argument can be made for Christians righteously rebelling against lesser civil magistrates (governors, mayors, and even presidents) in order to righteously submit to the highest civil magistrates (Federal and State Constitutions).



*Chapter Seven*

**DON'T BE A  
BITTER PROPHET**

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## THE ROTTEN ROOT OF BITTERNESS

**S**ince leaving California, I have regularly had to resist the temptation of bitterness. Although a group of about 15 adults chose to accompany me on my pilgrimage out of California, several others vehemently disagreed with my reasons for leaving. Some of these people thought I was merely being dramatic. Others thought I was selfishly "selling out."

Unless we are content to allow bitterness to rot our bones (Proverbs 14:30), it must be quickly uprooted and cast down at the foot of the cross of Christ. Often, we neglect to fight against bitterness because we deeply cherish this particular sin. While wallowing in our self-pity, we savor the thought of the downfall of those who opposed us. We will never put any sin to death that we do not hate. And we will never come to hate our sin until we recognize how destructive it is. In light of this, there is possibly no better example of the poisonous effects of bitterness than one



of my favorite books of the Bible - the book of Jonah.

## THE BACKDROP OF BITTERNESS

Jonah was one of the few popular prophets of his day. For the first portion of his tenure as a prophet, God commanded him to pronounce blessing and increase to his nation of Israel. Doubtless, the people welcomed Jonah with open arms as they heard his optimistic predictions and then watched these extraordinary events unfold. No one dislikes a man who assures them that it is the will of the Lord to bring blessing and prosperity. The people of Israel loved Jonah because he prophesied that Israel would be increased, and it all came to pass: "He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher" (2 Kings 14:25).

Despite God's prophetic word through Jonah to increase Israel's land, God had previously spoken through the prophet Isaiah that one day, the Assyrians would successfully invade Israel. We can be sure that Jonah was all too familiar with this prophecy. As a true prophet of the Lord, Jonah had diligently studied the previous predictions of his colleagues. And much to Jonah's dismay, as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, the Assyrians, who lived north of Israel, were beginning to make their pre-invasion attacks into the northern kingdom of Israel during the latter

portion of Jonah's ministry. It is also worth noting that Jonah lived in one of the northernmost towns in Israel's northern kingdom. Therefore, it is likely that Jonah personally witnessed several of these heinous attacks. He may have even seen the Assyrians brutally murder some of his closest friends, as well as even members of his own family. And, of course, the capital city of Assyria was none other than the great city of Nineveh.

A barbaric people inhabited Nineveh. Archaeologists have discovered ancient inscriptions in which Assyrian kings boasted of their acts of cruelty, such as filleting their enemies and hanging their skins on the city walls. In Jonah 3:8, when the king of Nineveh calls his people to repentance, he explicitly mentions their sin of violence: "But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands." And lest we forget, much of that violence was directly aimed at Israel. This, of course, explains why Jonah was so bitter towards these people. God calling Jonah to go to the Ninevites was the equivalent of God calling a Jew who survived the holocaust to go to Hitler and tell him that everything would be forgiven if he would simply repent.

Most people misunderstand the story of Jonah. They assume that Jonah was unwilling to go to Nineveh because he feared that the people would refuse to repent and turn on him and kill him. Ironically, this assumption is the exact opposite of the truth. On

the contrary, Jonah knew if he prophesied to Nineveh, there was a chance they would repent, and the wrath of God, which had been stored up against them, would be restrained. Jonah was not afraid of Nineveh's potential rejection of his message. Jonah was afraid of the possibility that they would accept his message. He longed for Nineveh to pay for their crimes against him and his people. How can we be so sure that this is the case? We can be sure by merely looking at what Jonah himself says to God right after Nineveh repents: "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:2-3).

## THE UGLINESS OF BITTERNESS

Jonah and his people had endured profound injustices at the hands of the Ninevites. Although difficult to bear, experiences of pain and suffering do not produce anger and hatred on their own. Only by pride comes such contention. Jonah's resentment toward Nineveh did not stem solely from his pain. Instead, it was the self-righteousness of Jonah that ultimately fueled his deep hatred. In other words, it is quite possible to be hurt by others without becoming bitter.

Tragically, Jonah didn't take the high road. In Jonah 4:5-6,

we see, "Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city." In other words, Jonah sets up camp right outside of the city to watch the fire and brimstone. He is unashamedly rooting for Nineveh's destruction. Jonah is still hoping that God might choose to reject Nineveh's repentance and follow through with his original judgment.

Although Jonah was filled with bitterness, God's heart of compassion for Nineveh is revealed at the very end of the book of Jonah when he says, "Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:11). Biblical commentators are divided over the meaning of these words. Some say that this "120,000" represents Nineveh's total population, referring to the moral ignorance of all the Ninevites. However, Jonah 3:3 says, "Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth." According to this measurement, many trusted historians and biblical scholars suspect that Nineveh's total population was much closer to 500,000 people. This theory has led scholars to believe that the "120,000," which God mentions in Jonah 4:11, was meant to exclusively refer to the young children in Nineveh who were not even old enough to distinguish their literal right hand from their left.

According to this interpretation, which seems to be the most

reliable, God is essentially saying that if Jonah refuses to have compassion toward the adults of Nineveh who have caused him so much pain, he should at least consider the children and livestock in Nineveh who have not willfully committed any acts of violence against Jonah and his people. However, despite God's admonishments, Jonah's heart remains hardened.

## MAKING EXCUSES FOR OUR BITTERNESS

In Jonah 4:6, we see that "the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant." This is the first time in the entire book that Jonah is happy. Jonah was unhappy about God's command to go to Nineveh. He was unhappy about the storm. He was quite unhappy during his stay inside the fish. And he was "exceedingly [unhappy]" about the repentance of Nineveh. Despite all of this, Jonah is "exceedingly glad" about a simple plant that provides for his comfort. The salvation of thousands of people "displeased Jonah exceedingly" (Jonah 4:1). Still, a little bit of shade caused the prophet to be "exceedingly glad" (Jonah 4:6). This is an unmistakable sign of bitterness.

However, Jonah's happiness is short-lived. God quickly sends a worm to destroy the plant and a scorching wind to rob Jonah of his comfort (Jonah 4:7-8). And what is Jonah's response? Once again, Jonah is angry. He is so mad that he asks God to take his

life: "When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, 'It is better for me to die than to live'" (Jonah 4:8). God uses something as trivial as a plant to get Jonah to acknowledge his sin. And in love, God strategically corners Jonah by a brilliantly crafted line of questioning.

Question #1: "Do you do well to be angry?" In Jonah 4:4, God asks Jonah if he thinks he is justified in his anger regarding God's choice to extend mercy to the city of Nineveh in response to their repentance. At this point, Jonah could have attempted to defend his frustration by arguing that he was angry toward God for showing mercy to Israel's enemy. Nineveh had committed unspeakable acts of violence against the people of God. Therefore, Jonah probably would have excused his anger as righteous indignation. Perhaps, he would have argued that his rage was merely a holy zeal for the good of his people and the glory of their God. A statement like this admittedly would seem noble enough.

Question #2: "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" In Jonah 4:9, we discover Jonah's anger about the loss of the plant, which sheltered him from the scorching sun. Now, this anger is much more difficult to defend. There is no noble justification for choosing to be angry in this particular instance. God is strategically proving to Jonah, in such a way that all Jonah's excuses will be rendered impotent, that he is not merely a moral man with a heart full of righteous indignation. Instead, Jonah is a self-righteous

man with a heart full of bitterness and idolatry. Jonah cares more about his personal comfort than the eternal salvation of thousands of people, the honor of Israel, and the glory of God.

Question #3: "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" In Jonah 4:10-11, we see God, in his infinite wisdom, now beginning to use Jonah's same faulty logic against him. If Jonah attempts to argue that his anger was justifiable for pitying the plant, then surely God is justified in pitying Nineveh's children and animals. Jonah might have been tempted to say, "Why did you destroy this perfectly innocent plant? Certainly, the plant did not do anything wrong." However, God would have then responded to Jonah by merely saying, "If this were truly your concern, then why are you angry about my choice of sparing innocent children and livestock? You cannot have it both ways." If it were wrong for God to destroy the plant by Jonah's logic, then it would have been wrong for God to kill the children and livestock in Nineveh. God is carefully peeling back Jonah's layers of defense to reveal his true hardness of heart.

## **BREAKING THE BITTERNESS CYCLE**

The sin of Jonah is relatively easy to spot, but this is likely

because it involves the failures of someone other than ourselves. When it comes to identifying our own sin, we are rarely willing to be so objective. And yet, our bitterness is likely just as apparent as Jonah's. The reason we don't see it as clearly is due to our pride. We are unwilling to ask ourselves one of the most critical questions: "Do you do well to be angry?" The answer is almost always, "No." So why do we persist in our anger and bitterness towards those who disagree with us? It is because we love our sin. We like the way our bitterness makes us feel. It feels good to be angry. And in our self-righteousness and self-pity, we often do not wish for anyone to take away our "right" to anger.

One of the effects of bitterness is that it shrouds our ability to reason. Logic is cast off to the wayside so that our anger can burn hot without any restraint. We run self-flattering scenarios through our heads on a feedback loop until we lose all ability to exercise sober judgment. Even our memory of past conflicts eventually begins to warp. Bitterness is like cancer. Once it spreads too far, it is nearly impossible to uproot. Fortunately, God is willing to go to great lengths to reveal our bitterness to us. Although this process is often painful, God's willingness to reveal our sin is perhaps one of the clearest signs of his love for us. God would be well within his rights to simply abandon us in our self-induced delusions. Instead, he pursues us with his loving light of truth.

So do I think many Christians are foolish to stay in liberal places like California? You bet. Do I think that the vast majority



of these Christians are compromising obedience to Christ's commands while consoling themselves with the false notion that they are living as "missionaries"? Yes sir. And am I a prideful man with the potential to harbor bitterness towards those who disagree with me, in daily need of God's grace to wage war against my sin? Undoubtedly. So to all those who have been willing to move their families across the country (or even the world) in order to practically obey Christ in every area of life, don't be a bitter prophet! "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20).





*Closing Remarks*

**A PASTOR'S  
PLEA FOR UNITY**

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## A PASTOR'S PLEA FOR UNITY

**O**ur nation, as well as many of our churches, is divided. Unity feels like a distant dream. So how can we attempt to bridge the gap? In my pastoral experience, I have only been able to achieve and preserve unity in two ways. The first approach is the extension of charity amid reasonable disagreement. The second approach is the power of persuasion.

Courage for Christians is desperately needed in this hour, but real courage never comes at the expense of charity and a genuine desire for unity among brothers and sisters: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity" (Psalm 133:1). However, Christian charity does not mean that there are no right answers to the questions we face. As followers of Jesus, we must uphold not only the "inerrancy" of God's Word but also the "sufficiency" of God's Word. We must believe that the Word of God speaks to all situations in life (although not always with the same degree of clarity). Furthermore, we must believe

that when God speaks, he never does so out of both sides of his mouth. One day, when we finally all stand before God, we will come to realize that some of us got it right, while others got it wrong. So for those of us who esteem truth, we must reject the ridiculous notion that two contradicting positions can both be right at the same time.

Charity amid disagreement certainly helps to preserve a sense of harmony. Still, the most effective way to achieve unity is for as many people as possible to be persuaded of the same position. Persuasion is a fine art. It can be immensely challenging to persuade others while simultaneously seeking to avoid unnecessary dogmatism. Regardless, we must try. Although charity amid disagreement is good, agreement is better. Therefore, we must commit to honing our persuasive skills, recognizing that our goal is not to win the argument merely but to win the person. As we lovingly seek to persuade one another, we must do our best to suspend unfair judgments about a person's character. And we must diligently work to avoid falling into the deadly trap of self-righteousness and pride.

## **FINAL TAKEAWAYS**

The point of this little book is simple. Don't enslave yourself to a gospel-less rite of passage. Find meaning and worth in Christ, and let go of your insatiable hunger for personal glory. Live a truly radical life of faithfulness to God by doing what's best for

your family in accordance with Scripture. Make real sacrifices for the sake of others, but not at the cost of obedience to Christ. Be discerning and courageous by not falling for the myth of neutrality. Righteously rebel against tyranny in humble submission to God. Learn to recognize that there is no shame in a temporary and tactical retreat, and that fleeing the battle is sometimes the best strategy for winning the war.

And if you do decide to leave a blue state (or even a liberal country), don't be a self-righteous jerk. Don't look down on those who see things differently than you do. Continue to speak the truth in love, and resolve never to be a bitter prophet. After all, leaving places like California doesn't mean you should ever stop loving places like California.