

Civil Disobedience in Church History Part One

The Book of Acts

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 27, 2023

*Note: you can view the PowerPoint for this sermon as it's attached to the video either on our website or YouTube.

Good morning, everyone. You guys sound excited. Well today, we are beginning a new series entitled "The Christian and Civil Disobedience." We have a PowerPoint up here, there we go. We are going to talk about what the Bible says about the subject of civil disobedience, and whether it's okay for a Christian to disobey the government or not. It's something that really doesn't need much of an introduction because in light of recent events here in Canada, and in North America really all over the world, it's something that's on everybody's minds. And so, in order to shepherd our congregation, we wanted to talk about this as a church because there is a lot of confusion about it, frankly. If you go online, it seems like we talked about this the other day as elders and deacons, but it seems like there's just another article, sermon, blog, coming out really endlessly on this topic and saying one thing or saying another; some of it's good, some of it's bad, mostly it's just kind of a mixture. If you Google the word "Church and State" on your computer, you'll get a million hits. And so that's why it's important for us to study this together as a church family so we can wrap our minds around this, so we can be unified about it, so we can understand what the Bible says about it, even what history says about the subject. Because people have asked me the question, you know, "Pastor Jeremy, what are you going to do if the government closes churches again? And how are the elders going to respond if they step in and say the lockdowns are coming back?" And that's a good question that you need an answer to. That's why the elders have actually drafted a document that spells out our response to this that I'll read to you at the end of the series, but before we get there, I just want to explain where it's coming from and walk you through this step by step so we can understand and be on the same page.

Because just to be honest, the Bible does say that you can defy the government as a Christian. And it does tell you just to be very clear that you don't have to do everything that it tells you. You see that in history; you see that in the Bible, I counted up probably 30 examples, there's maybe more of where someone disobeyed the government, Old Testament and in the New. But at the same time, it also says you have to do some of the things that tells you and you can't disobey them in everything. There's a balance here.

The reason I say that just on the front end of this series is because if you do go online, and I've listened to a lot of material and read a lot of articles, some people are telling you the opposite of that. And they're saying that they turn to a passage like Romans 13, where it says every person has to be in subjection to the governing authorities, and they say that does not apply to us if the government does not fulfill its God ordained role. Which makes you wonder, well, what do you mean by that? Do you mean we can

ignore the government completely if they don't keep their God ordained role? Because there's not a government on the planet right now that's completely keeping its God ordained role. Is this saying that you can throw out everything they tell you like paying taxes or wearing a seatbelt? Or driving the speed limit? Or stopping at a stop sign? Or respecting the police? The question is, where are the boundaries here to civil disobedience? What are the parameters? Because I don't think anybody in here came to church this morning, disobeying everything the government told them. I'm guessing all of you stopped at a stop sign, turned on your blinker, wore your seatbelt because we understand that the government still is there for a reason. So we got to talk through this and think through this so we can have a proper understanding.

Do you guys see why this series is important? I'll take your silence as yes. In fact, just to show you how confusing the subject is for everybody right now, I did some research on this, and I found there's a lot of different views on the subject of the government and Christian circles. But if you boil it down, I think there are three main ones, and I don't think we can even go further into this series without stopping for a moment to talk about this.

Because throughout history, Christians have been so divided over this, that the subject has put them into three camps.

So the first one would be the camp of what's called Dominionism. Dominionism says that the Church and State are one. So the church governs the state, and the state governs the church. The two things are intertwined. The term Dominionism, also known as theonomy, communicates the idea that it's the church's job to rule the world, not just spiritually, but physically. It's our job to influence it to the point that we take over not just religiously, but legally, diplomatically, politically, and constitutionally. Now, that may sound strange to you living in Canada or if you come from somewhere like the United States, where I come from, that's not the view that the countries have typically had. But it is the view that was held by the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. With the rise of Catholicism, this is what they did during that time, the Pope was not just the head of the church, he was considered to be the head of everything. The Church and State, priests and government, the army and the clergy, the whole thing was put into the same category. This was also surprisingly enough, I'll show you in a moment the view of the Protestant reformers, many of them, because when men like Martin Luther and John Calvin broke away from Rome, they set up their own Christian government in places like Geneva and Germany, which was better. It was better than the Catholic government, but at the same time, they still did a lot of horrible things like killing heretics.

It least to a second view the church has had over this issue, and that's the view of strict separationism. Strict separationism says the church is to be separate from the state in every regard and have nothing to do with it. It's the opposite of Dominionism. So if you're going to put them on a scale, put them on the stage, you would put Dominionism over here to your left, and you would put strict separationism on your right. Because they say you should ignore the government completely. Not just a little bit, but a lot.

I mean, not just in a few things, but in everything to the extent that you should not pay your taxes and you should not respect the police and you should not wear a seatbelt because there's only one king, and that is King Jesus. That's the way the thinking goes. This was a view that was adopted by the Anabaptist during the Reformation. If you've looked at that period of time, before you'll know that this is what they did. They tried to shut the state out of their lives completely, and do their own thing, and really blow it all off. And that's why the Reformers had such a hard time with them. They were very revolutionary in that sense. It's also the view, if you want a modern-day view of this, this is the view of the Amish. And some of you live in communities or come from places where the Amish were, and the Amish have a mindset that they go into the woods and remain isolated so they can avoid government interference, is the mindset. If you want to get even more revolutionary, there are some militant Christian groups like the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas who did the same thing. Now that's extreme. That's a cult I don't even think that's hardly even worth saying too much about but that's why they stockpiled weapons. They were against the government in every regard.

Which brings you to another view on the subject of the government in Christian circles today, and that is what we could call biblical separationism. Biblical separationism falls somewhere in the middle of those two positions closer to this end of things, the strict separationist to end because it says the church is to be separate from the state, but not in every regard. You see the difference there. The two things are not the same. The church has its role, and the government has its role to play in the world, but they're not combined. They need to do their best to get along where they can. This is the view of the founding fathers of the United States. We'll see later in this series. Men like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington held to this kind of thing. And I would argue this morning, this is the view of the church in Acts. I think if you look at these views and laid them side by side and stack them up and consider them, and what they're saying, I think you would find this is the view the apostles held to, which means it's the position we should take today. We don't want our ideas to come from history first. We want to learn from history. We don't want them to come from our preferences. We've all got our preferences on the government; everybody does. We want them to come from Scripture.

To show you this if you would open your Bibles to the book of Acts. This is the book we're going to look at this morning. We're going to start here; We're going to talk about quite a bit of stuff today because we are introducing this series, but as you know, the book of Acts is about the history of the early church. It tells you how it got started. And as it does that, it shows you how Jesus and the apostles and the Christians dealt with the issue of government, there was a government in the book of Acts, there were politicians, there were ruling authorities. Many of them were corrupt, many of them, get this, were more corrupt than yours. They would murder them. They were awful. So the book of Acts tells you how they wrestled with this issue. And it starts off in Acts chapter one. If you look in verse six, it says something very interesting. This is a verse I'm guessing that you've read before, but you probably may not have stopped and thought about what it's saying. But it says,

So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

Now, we can stop there, we don't have to go further. But that's interesting because it tells you in this verse what was on the minds of the apostles before Jesus ascended into heaven, and they were thinking about what? The kingdom. Jesus has just come to the people of Israel and shown Himself to be the King. He has just ministered among them, done miracles, taught and preached and all that kind of stuff. He's raised himself from the dead, the Lord raised Him. So what did they ask Him? They asked Him in verse six. “Lord, is it at this time you're restoring the kingdom to Israel?” Now, that raises another question. Well, what kingdom are they referring to? What government are they talking about? The kingdom is a government, right? What political system are they mentioning here? It's a political one; it's the government of the Messiah. It's the kingdom of the Anointed One. That's what all the Jews wanted to see at this time in history. They were hoping for a saviour to come and rule and reign over them in order to drive the cursed Romans out. And what does He say to their request in this verse? He says, “no.” It's not for you to know the times of that. And listen, He's not saying there is not a time. There is a time. And He's not telling you it's not going to happen someday. What He's saying is it's not happening now. So you need to get your mind on other things.

Verse eight says, “You will be my witnesses instead.” And I would say this verse sets the stage for what we're going to talk about in this series because this is where you see the separation of church and state really come into the forefront, at least in the Bible anyway, as far as I know. Because before this, Israel was a what? You guys know the term. They were a theocracy. You could say they were Dominionists because they had a kingdom where the church and state were one under the Lord; they were intertwined just like the Dominionist. And the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages said they were going back to that. You can read about that in the Old Testament, and now the disciples are asking for this to be restored. They want it back, and Jesus tells them no. And from this point onwards, He's going to do something different in the world.

Now, make no mistake, they will go back to a political kingdom one day, and there will come a time when the church and state will be reunited under the rulership of King Jesus: the book of Revelation talks about that, but it's not now.

As I was studying this this week, I have to be honest, I thought that was pretty clear. Maybe not everybody feels that way, but it seemed pretty obvious to me especially when you read the book of Acts. And you see how the disciples applied these words because they didn't try to unite the church and state. They never tried to take over the government. So it makes you wonder, at least it made me wonder as I was studying this, why is this so confusing then? Why is it so hard for us to follow? Why are there three

positions on this? There's not just three, by the way, there's probably a hundred. Why is there's so much material on the internet coming out saying one thing and another and this and that and going here and there? Where did the Roman Catholic Church come up with the idea of Dominionism? Where did the Amish come up with the idea of running away? Where did the Branch Davidians come up with the idea of fighting the world and stockpiling weapons and getting ready for war? Where did all that begin? I would say that it began in church history. They got it from the people in the past.

I think you know this, but the book of Acts is not the end of the story for us as a church. There are a lot of things that happened after the book of Acts that really impact the way you look at the issue of government. And I don't think you can really understand what's happening in the world today if you don't take the time to go back and look at it. This week, I was trying to just open the Bible and explain all these ideas. And as I was doing that, I realized there's a lot of these ideas that just aren't found in the Bible. They're not there. And so the only way to get your mind around it is to go into history and see where they come from. It's been said, "If you don't learn from history, you will repeat it." And that's what the church has done all throughout its existence on this planet; it just keeps making the same mistakes over and over and over again.

Whether it be in the area of Dominionism or theonomy, or Christian nationalism, which says we have to make Canada a Christian nation again, the reality is that people have tried that before us and failed. They've tried to make other countries Christian before. This is not the first time in history, that kind of conversation has happened. They tried it with the Holy Roman Empire. They tried to make Germany into the new Israel. They tried to turn England into the kingdom of God on earth for years and years, and it didn't work.

And I think we need to wrap our minds around this and talk about it, the best way to explain this is not really to tell you, let me just show you what I mean by this. So this morning, we're going to start looking at three stages in the history of the church's relationship with the government. So we're gonna look at three stages in the history of the church's relationship with the government. We're not going to get through all the stages of history this morning is just too much here, but I think this will be very helpful for you, at least it was helpful for me to study it and to try to understand.

The first one is the stage of the early church. It refers to the time from the first century to the fourth century. So this is the first 300 years or so from the apostles to the time of the rise of a man named Constantine, that I'll show you about here in just a moment. This is where it begins. Listen, the church did not begin in the 21st century. Does everybody understand that today? Boy, that would shake up the internet, wouldn't it? It didn't start here. It started in the first century. And so that's where you have to go back to understand even what's happening now and why we think the way we do.

When you do this, and you go back to this period of time, it will strike you right off the bat, that the church has always had a difficult relationship with the government. Always. This is not the first time the

two of them wrestled with each other because the church grew so rapidly in the book of Acts that it caught the government by surprise. They didn't quite understand what was going on because it blew up so quickly. Just to show you this in the book of Acts. If you look in Acts 2:41, it says that after Jesus said these words to the disciples in chapter one about the kingdom, Peter preaches the first Christian sermon at Pentecost, and 3,000 people are saved as a result. Now think about that. Just a handful of disciples before, about 100 or so a little more than that, and now there's 3,000 just like that. We know it's 3,000 because the Spirit says this here, but presumably, somebody probably counted them. That's how you normally got numbers. They probably gave one person the task of going around and going 1, 2, 3, 4 till he came to that extraordinary amount. And then if you look in Acts 4:4, it says that after that, just a few verses later, the number goes up to 5,000. Because the excitement didn't stop, and then the revival did not slow down. Instead, it just keeps getting higher and higher and higher. Then over in Acts, chapter 11:21 it says that it grows even more until this time it just calls it a large number. You see that there? "The Lord was with them and a large number who believed turned to the Lord." Because the number was so big, they didn't even count it all up, which would have taken the government by surprise wherever they went, the whole thing would have blown them away. There weren't too many people living in Israel at the time anyway. This last chapter here, I think these things take place in Antioch, but the nation of Israel was not a big nation. And so numbers like this would have shaken up the whole leadership structures. So in response, the government in the book of Acts does the only thing they know to do, they persecuted. They started attacking the early church.

And we don't have time to get into every persecution that occurs between the apostles and the Jews in the book of Acts, but the first one that draws your attention, is back in chapter four with the arrest of Peter and John. If you want to turn over there because in Acts chapter four, it tells us that Peter had performed a miracle in the temple. And he healed a man right outside the gates, which was an innocent thing to do. Nothing wrong with that. I mean, what's wrong with healing somebody? Right? Why would anybody be offended by that? But it draws attention, and that's what gets the government involved. You don't want to make attention in the temple. Even today, if you go to Jerusalem, they will tell you don't have a Bible study up there, don't make anybody mad at the temple, they will carry you off. It's a very volatile place now; it was a volatile place then. And in Acts chapter 4:18 it says that they summoned him and some of the apostles and commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus. In other words, they put a gag order on them. They told them to be silent. Stop talking about this guy. And Peter says in verse 20, look at these words, he says, "For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." Now, as far as I can tell, that is the first example of civil disobedience in the book of Acts.

And you guys love reading the Scriptures and you love studying them, so maybe some of you might find a time that it happened before then, but as far as I can see, that was the first time someone in the early church looked at the government and said no to something. The government said, "Don't tell anybody about Jesus." Peter said, "No." They told him to remain silent about the name. He said, "I'm not going to do that." He told them, "We will obey you in other ways since you are leaders." He didn't actually say that here, but that's kind of implied as far as we know. Peter was a taxpaying man; he was very

compliant. I think he would be the kind of guy that would wear a seatbelt. But he said, “We're not going to do this. This is where we draw the line. This is where we plant the flag. This is where we put our foot in the sand and say, ‘this far and no further.’”

Which leads you to another altercation in the next chapter that goes right along with this. If you look in chapter 5:17. Over there, it says that as the apostles continue to heal people. Again, they're healing people. What is so bad about healing people? The high priest rises up with his associates, and he arrests them again because it says he's full of jealousy; he's envious. People are following the apostles and not them. They're going to listen to their message and ignoring the priests and rabbis and all these guys, and so he tries to silence him again, which doesn't work again because Peter tells them in verse 29 that “we must obey God rather than men.” Now, that's quite a statement just in and of itself. I did a sermon on this about three years ago when we talked about the government before because it gives you the feel of what's really being said here. Peter says, “We respect you. We'll submit to your leadership in many ways. We're on trial here. We didn't resist arrest, we didn't run, but at the same time, we don't answer to you first. I mean, first we answer to God.” Peter says, “Let's just get this straight at the outset here, so there's no misunderstanding.” You could say, we believe there's a kingdom of God and there's, in a smaller sense, a kingdom of man or a government of man. There's a domain where God is in control, and He rules and reigns and calls the shots, which is really over everything. And then there's a domain where He lets men do that to some degree in their own small capacity. And Peter says when they clash, we go with God. We always go with God. We will forever Go with God. Peter says we're citizens of heaven first. I'm not Jewish first. If you remember, these are Jewish authorities. And Peter's Jewish. And these are leaders of the people of Israel. And as such, they would have expected a certain level of compliance from him. They would have wanted him to get in line, stop all this Jesus talk, stop causing trouble. And Peter says, “I'm not going to do it. I have a higher King than you and it is the Lord Jesus Christ.”

And when you read the book of Acts, the reason I'm telling you this, is because it gives you a feel for the book of Acts, you find this is how all the apostles felt about this. They all had that sense of priority. In fact, it won't be too long after this, that the first Christian martyr, Stephen will be killed and Acts 7 under similar circumstances. He's talking to the same group of people. And he calls them stiff-necked because they are not listening to the gospel and the Word, and they kill them. And then an Acts 8, a general persecution breaks out with one person going this way and another person going this way. If you think everybody in the book of Acts responded the same way to government persecution, read Acts chapter 8; they didn't. Everybody kind of did the best they could under this awful situation. And then in Acts 12 James is killed, and Peter is arrested again. And somewhere in the midst of all this, the apostle Paul gets saved, and he just keeps getting beaten and stoned and arrested. And the book of Acts ends this way with Paul in jail. Now think about that. It would be nice if it ended with him in a palace on a throne, right? Wouldn't that be great? It'd be nice if it ended with him conquering the world at the head of an army. That's not how the book ends. He's in house arrest. The book kind of starts this way in chapter four with Peter in jail. It ends in chapter 28 with Paul in jail. They just swapped one jailbird for another,

which serves as a reminder that the church in the book of Acts, didn't start on good terms with the political authorities. On the contrary, the relationship was storming from the start.

Several years ago, somebody gave me a document. I've never forgotten it. It was a list of how the early apostles died. And some of this information is taken from the book of Acts. Some of it's taken from church history. If you read a book like Foxes Book of Martyrs, you can read some of the stories that were passed down to the early church. But this is how the early apostles died. It said Bartholomew was nailed to a cross skinned alive and then beheaded in Armenia. Andrew was crucified in Greece. Stephen was stoned in Jerusalem. James, the son of Zebedee was beheaded in Jerusalem. James, the Last was thrown from the highest point in the temple in Jerusalem, and he didn't die, the fall broke his legs, so the priests ran him through with a spear. John the apostle is placed in a pot of boiling oil in Rome; he didn't die so he was banished to a prison labor Alcatraz type island called Patmos. Philip was either crucified or stoned to death in Samaria. Matthew was nailed to the ground with short spears and beheaded in Ethiopia. Jude, brother of James was beaten to death in Oedema a small country outside of present-day Iran. Simon the Zealot was crucified and tortured by the government in Syria. Paul was beheaded in Rome after a shipwreck, numerous beatings, imprisonments and humiliations. Peter, after watching the crucifixion of his wife, was crucified in Rome upside down because he said he wasn't worthy to die as Jesus did. That's an awful list.

And I mean, it's just it makes your skin crawl, but it shows you what it was like to be a Christian at this time in history; it was a very gruesome affair. And a lot of this came at the hands of the government. Now I'm not saying that to paint them in a bad light. I'm not saying that even attack them. It's just a fact. All the violence was given at the hands of political leaders or often due to their neglect because there were times when they could have stopped it and they didn't. Now there were a few times it was just mob violence, but the government did not put down the violence. Which means if you think being a Christian gives you a good relationship with the political authorities, you just need to think again. Sometimes it does. There are times in history when they respect the fact that we're being salt and light and being godly examples and putting Christ, exalting Him. But there's other times where it just doesn't. And this is one of those.

And I wish I could tell you, coming from the book of Acts, that the story gets better after this, but it doesn't. It'd be nice to say things were more peaceful in time between the church and the state, and they learned to get along. But that really wasn't the case at all. The troubles with the governments are going to intensify over the next several centuries. As the Gospel goes out to the nations, and people get saved in places like Corinth, and Ephesus, and Rome, it begins to draw the attention of Caesar who cracks down on it. That's gradual at first. If you look at the history books, it's interesting that the Romans at first thought the Christians were just a bunch of weirdos. But as time the tune began to change, especially when you saw things like slaves get saved, and masters get saved, and then they go to the same church and sit beside each other. Romans had a hard time with that. In fact, there were stories of some slaves

becoming pastors, and the masters sitting in the pews and listening to them. They really had a hard time with that. And so they start persecuting.

There's several reasons for this, the persecution, one is some of the social elements. But one reason they had a hard time is because the Romans believed Caesar was God. And they thought he deserved to be worshipped as such, and the Christians refused to do it. Remember, we must obey God rather than man. And so the early church put their foot down and said, "That's not going to happen." So the Romans started persecuting them. And it happened in interesting ways. One Roman Emperor named Decius in 249 A.D. issued an edict, and the words are up here. I'm not going to read them for the sake of time, but you can just see the words where he said that every Roman household had to have a sworn affidavit attesting to the fact that they made a sacrifice to him. So everybody had to have an official legal document signing their name off on the fact that they made an offering in his name. If they didn't, he said he would kill them. That was the punishment for this. And there is no limit to the things that he would do. Decius had his soldiers hang the Christians, behead the Christians, and crucify them. He had them stone them, drown them, and throw them to the lions in the amphitheater. He would sew them up in sacks with scorpions, he would maim them and cut off parts of their body, some he would just banish, but the list just goes on and on. He was a very wicked man; all the Caesars were like this. And it caused trouble for the early church.

Another thing that caused trouble for the church was the fact that the Romans had a list of religions, they saw as permissible. They were called the *religiosita* which means permissible religions or legal religions. Christianity was not on it. The Romans put Judaism on the list, so the Jews could; they were a permitted religion. They could worship God in peace. They were granted the rights of peaceful assembly for the most part; they did have some troubles with the Romans. Polytheism was on the list. So if you were a Roman and you wanted to worship Zeus or Poseidon or Hadees, that was permissible, but the one thing they did not permit was Christianity. Because Christians worshipped a dead Jew, and the Romans did not like that. And even worse, Christians worshipped a dead Jew who was crucified, and they thought that was repulsive. Crucifixion was ugly to the Romans, so they forbade them from coming together under pain of death.

And this is why the early church met in tombs at this time. Since they couldn't meet in broad daylight, what they would do is they would find a graveyard nearby underneath the streets of the city and they would pray and sing and worship the Lord there. It's called the Church of the Catacombs. I've got some pictures of it here. Those, if you see on your left-hand top corner there, those rows, that's where they would put bones. Those were tombs. Now we think of tombs as this big kind of circular thing. What they would do is they would put a body on a slab, let it decompose, roll the bones up into a garment and stick them in there kind of almost like a cubby hole you would put your shoes in or something; that's what they would do. And these things would go on for miles. These tunnels, if you go to Rome today, you can go underneath the ground of the city, the ancient part of the city and you can see these things. And the early church would draw symbols on the walls to show people where to meet because they

would go on for so long, in order to keep from getting lost, they would put an image of a cross or the Christian fish, or the Greek letter *kai*, which is just like our letter *x*. It's the first letter in Christ. And that's how you would know to turn left, turn right, we're going to meet here. Because this is what it was like to be a Christian back then; you had to go to places like this and hold services among the dead.

I've heard people say today, they would like to go back to this. Wouldn't it be great to be a Christian in the early church? I don't think so. I mean, you saw the church have such a hard time during the last several years of all the government interference and COVID and that kind of stuff. Can you imagine what would happen if this happened? I mean, it'd be great to see the church grow and thrive, and new people come to the Lord, but at the same time, you would have to go to the place where people were buried and listen to sermons. You'd have to sing down there.

And unfortunately, I don't have time to go into every story we could mention from this time period, but if you could remember one name, or at least one name that really stuck out to me was the name Polycarp. Anybody heard of Polycarp before? Yeah, most a lot of you guys have. He was the Bishop of Smyrna. Remember the church of Smyrna in the book of Revelation? This was the man who pastored that later on. He lived from 69 to 155 A.D., which means he lived within the time of the apostles. Some say he was discipled by John himself, so he sat under the apostle John's preaching, he listened to his teaching, he was trained up under him because that's the way it worked back then. One man would take the gospel and pass it to the next man who passed it to the next man who passed it to the next man. And Polycarp was the next in line after the 12 apostles. So that's how important he really is to history. Unfortunately, not a lot is known about his early years, but the story of his martyrdom is well attested. Because when Polycarp was an old man of 86, the Roman Emperor ordered everyone in the empire to make a sacrifice in his name. Remember that theme we just talked about? That happened quite a bit, and Polycarp wouldn't do it. And so the authorities came after him, and they arrested him at the age of 86. And they put them on trial whereby he had an interesting conversation with a judge who was a younger man. So this is an older man talking to a younger man. And the judge said, "Out with the atheists!" And by that he meant the Christians because the Christians worshipped one God, the Romans called them atheists because of that. That's not enough gods they said. So Polycarp said, "Yes, out with the atheists." And by that he meant the Romans because they acted like atheists. He's like, your religion doesn't do you any good anyway; you're the atheists. It's kind of how the courtroom drama is playing out. The judge says, "Swear by Caesar." Polycarp says, "No." The judge says, "I'll throw you to the beasts." Polycarp said, "Bring on your beasts." The judge said, "I'll set you to the sword." Polycarp said, "Bring on the sword." The judge said, "If you scorn that, I will put you in the fire." And Polycarp said, "Well you threaten me with the fire that burns for an hour, but you forget the fire of hell that burns forever." And so finally out of exasperation, because Polycarp was trying to witness to this guy, finally, the judge says, "Will you just renounce the name of Christ?" And Polycarp said these words. He said, "Eighty-six years I've served Him. He's done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" So the judge said, "Okay, so be it." So he took them to a nearby amphitheater where people could watch while

he was burned alive. They tied his arms to the stake, and they lit him on fire. As the story goes, the fire didn't quite kill him, so a soldier ran him through with a sword and he died.

And the reason I tell you that story is because there were a lot of things that happened like that at this time. That's not an unusual story. Now today that would be very unusual, especially in North America. We've never seen this before. Back then they saw it all the time. This was normal for Christians. When you read the history books, you find so many people at this time got saved, served the Lord, then they were martyred. And then the next one comes around, they get saved, they serve the Lord, they're martyred. And then the next one comes around, they get saved, they serve the Lord. Same thing again over and over again. To the point one Roman soldier sarcastically said, "Why are these Christians so willing to die? They have cliffs to jump off of. Why don't they use those and leave us alone?" But the reason they're willing to do this is because they had a higher sense of calling than the things of this world. They were looking to heaven. They weren't looking to all of this. And that's something the secular government just never understood. How can people do this? How can they die this way? How can they have such passion? And by the way, the Romans also said, "At the same time, they're defying us, these Christians are decent people. Their marriages are better than our marriages. Their children turn out better than our children. When we throw our unwanted kids on the street because we don't care for them anymore, they pick them up and take them home and adopt them. And we're killing them."

Which brings you to the next point. This is the next stage in the history of the church's relationship with the government, and that's the stage of the Roman Catholic Church. You could call this a lot of things I've heard it called the stage of Imperial Christianity, the stage of Dominionism, you could call it. But we'll just call it the stage of the Catholic Church, from the time of the fourth century all the way up until the 15th, right before the Reformation. You could call it also the Middle Ages.

Because in the fourth century, something happened that would change everything for the church. It would make the persecution stop. It would end the violence, but at the same time, it would bring a whole new set of problems. I think sometimes you think, "Well, if the violence stops, all your problems are over." That's not actually what happened. Now you're gonna see a whole different set of problems come in, and it started with the arrival of a man named Constantine. Anybody heard of Constantinople? Heard of that? It is named after this man. Or how about Constantinianism? Does that sound familiar from your history class? That's a political philosophy that started with him. He was a very influential person in history.

But he was a Roman general, who became involved in a civil war with his archenemy, Maxentius in the fourth century. Roman generals fought a lot and oftentimes the victor would become the new emperor. That's the way it worked. They were scheduled to fight a major battle on the Milvian Bridge, it's a bridge located right between the city of Rome and the mainland. And the significance to it is that it served as the gateway to the capital so that whoever won this skirmish would become the emperor. He would march into Rome with the soldiers and take over. And Constantine tells a story that on the eve of the battle, he received a vision in the clouds, where he saw a cross with the words "In hoc signo vinces"

written over it, which means “In this sign, conquer.” Now remember, what did the cross stand for before this? Torture. It was a brutal way of killing people. Constantine sees a vision of this; it's almost like a vision of an electric chair in the sky. And he took it to mean that if he painted that cross on the shields of his soldiers, he would win the battle. And he did that, and it worked because he did win. On that day, he achieved a major victory over Maxentius in spite of overwhelming odds, partially due to the fact that they had these crosses on their shields and it kind of freaked the enemy out. But also due to the simple fact that Constantine was a good general. He positioned his army in a way that it threw Maxentius's forces into the river where they drowned. They couldn't swim. But at that point, he becomes emperor of Rome.

Now to be clear, I couldn't find any evidence that he was a Christian before this. By all accounts, Constantine was just another Roman, but a lot of his troops were. He knew a lot of men in the army who claimed to follow Christ, and somehow that had an impact on him. So to win their support, he pulled what some consider to be a big political stunt by switching allegiance. Now whether that's true or not, I don't know. But whatever the reason he takes it one step further after the battle, and in 313 A.D. you need to know this, he passes what's called the Edict of Milan, which legalizes Christianity. It puts it on the *religiosita* list. Remember the permitted religions list? Now it's a permitted religion.

The importance of that edict is that for the first time in history, the emperor allows the church to come out of hiding and meet in the open. And he allows Christians to leave the tombs behind and worship the Lord in broad daylight, which was exciting because it brought a newfound sense of freedom to the church. But it was also very weird. I mean, for 300 years, the church had never done this, for centuries. And not only that there's accounts of people showing up in the fourth century to church who were missing an eye because it was gouged out by the soldiers. Or they would walk into a room like this to sing and praise God, and they couldn't because their tongue was cut out. So the whole thing just looked like something maybe out of almost a horror show. It was just hard to make sense of it. People were maimed, they were branded, they were blinded. And the whole thing became even more perplexing to the church when Constantine started taking leadership over the body of Christ and telling it what to do.

Now see, this is where you're going to see the church and the state start doing this. Because he's the Emperor of Rome, and in his mind, this is what emperors do. “I'm Caesar. I oversee all aspects of society, including religion.” And so he became a dictator. He didn't become a dictator; he already was a dictator. Now, he just put his dictatorship over the church, and he took it upon himself to plant a church here or plant a church there. Or set up a pastor in this congregation or a pastor in that congregation, he would call what they would call Ecumenical Councils, councils of all the Christians. Before this, all the Christians could not come together because they were persecuted. Now they would have all the Christians come together and hash out things, and who would be sitting in the leader's chair? Constantine.

Another thing he did was to give priority to the church in Rome. It was the capital city. He was located in the heart of the empire. Later on, Constantine would transfer his capital to Constantinople. And there would start to be a little bit of a war between the East and the West. And that's why the Eastern Orthodox church many years later would split from Rome and that kind of thing. But at this time, he gave this church a sense of privilege. So that the church in Rome started mediating disputes between other churches, it started overseeing activities, until eventually over time, they took over as well. This really came to the forefront when the barbarians sacked Rome in 410 A.D. and at that point, the Empire falls, and everyone in Christianity starts looking for a leader, and they find one in the Bishop of Rome, who they start calling Pope. I think we've all heard the term, Pope. It means father, father of the faithful father of the church, father of you, is the thinking. And this is jumping a little ahead in history, some of these things took time to overlap, or to develop, but over time, the pope starts depicting himself as a king as well, that everyone has to bow down to when they see him. He sits on a throne, he wears a crown, he has a ring you have to kiss. And in some cases with the Popes, they would make you kiss their feet. That's what this picture was. That's the one of the kings of Europe kissing the Pope's feet.

Can I just tell you that could not get any farther from the Heart of Jesus Christ? Christ washed people's feet. He served; the pope flips the whole thing on its head. And now he says you have to serve me.

There's a famous story from this period of time that really illustrates this when the English King Henry the fourth, offended the pope over some issue. So the pope threatened to excommunicate him. He said, "I'm going to banish all your subjects, you won't be able to take the mass, you won't be able to enter our buildings." And so Henry goes to Italy with his wife and young son and kneels outside barefoot in the snow for several days until the pope forgives him. The king did that. The King of England, one of the most powerful nations in Europe. That's how the church began to view itself during this era. They thought, "We're up here; everyone else is down here. We call the shots over everything. It's your job to bow beneath this."

If you want to look at this with another Latin phrase, a lot of people spoke Latin at this time, so we're going into a lot of Latin things, but the church began to adopt the doctrine of *Corpus Christianum*, versus *Corpus Christi*. And what that means is it began to look at the body of Christendom over the body of Christ. You see the difference? Those two things probably tell you the difference on all the positions of church and state right there. The Catholic Church began to create a Christian government, a Christian culture, a Christian society, a Christian rule, where they began to teach the notion that everyone is saved because they're part of the Empire, or they could be saved. They had a whole list of things you had to do, but everyone can go to heaven because they're Roman, or French, or Italian or whatever. Whether they believe or not doesn't really matter. Whether you're converted or not, that's not the main thing. The main thing is your part of the nation, or you submit to my rule is the idea, the Pope's rule. When you look in the book of Acts, you find very clearly, they didn't care what nation you're part of, did they? And when the apostles went out and evangelized and shared the Gospel, it didn't matter to

them, whether you were Corinthian, or Ephesian, or Philippian. They didn't care. The people at this time looked at it very differently.

There was one Pope. There's a lot of quotes we could give from this time, but here's one from Pope Boniface, the eighth, declared in 1302, that “We are compelled in virtue of our faith to believe and maintain that there is only one holy Catholic Church [or Catholic empire in the sense, Christendom] and that one is apostolic. This we firmly believe and profess without qualification. [And here's the kicker] outside this church, there is no salvation.” That's why it was such a big deal for Henry and England to be excommunicated from the Catholic Church. Because if he's thrown out of the Catholic Church, there is no salvation. When he said that, he means outside of my kingdom, my church, my domain, no one goes to heaven. If you become a Christian at this time, and there were some believers who trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, believed the gospel, turned to His cross, that was all they were hoping in. But to the Catholic Church, that was not enough.

By the way, this is where you saw, I'm saying these things to give you some perspective here, but this is where you saw certain things like infant baptism show up in a major way in history. To be fair, people were sprinkled or baptized as babies before this, but now what you see is that infant baptism begins to replace believers' baptism as a main mode of entering the church. Because the idea that the Catholic Church said was just like the Jews are circumcised and placed into the kingdom of Israel, so Christians need to be baptized and placed into the kingdom of God, the physical and spiritual kingdom. They would immerse people as well, but they did it in some very odd ways. There are tales of generals forcing people to be baptized at the point of a sword in massive groups so they could all enter into the state.

This is also where you saw other things like the execution of heretics begin. This is where Christians start killing other Christians. Now, before this, Christians were killed by non-Christians. And prior to this time, they were executed by the secular authorities but now the church is the main instigator of that which is far worse in my opinion. According to some estimates, the Spanish Inquisition alone killed as many as one person a day for over a year. That's how far the church had fallen. It's gotten to the point that it's condoning the act of murder in order to purify the church. You got to cut out the dead branches. You have got to get rid of the tares among the wheat. That was the thinking, so they started to murder. The Pope plunged everything into darkness. People were in the dark scholastically because they couldn't read. They were in the dark economically because they couldn't make ends meet. Worst of all, they were in the dark spiritually. They didn't know God. The Gospel was almost forgotten during this time. I heard the Middle Ages once referred to as a thousand years without a bath. And it's true. If you look at the paintings from this time, everything looks dirty. There's filth on it; a cake overall. But fortunately, by the grace of God, it doesn't stay that way.

God does something in the 1500's that turns the world around, and I think we know what it was. It's called the Protestant Reformation. Can we just say, “Praise God for the times when He dips His finger in

history and brings revival? Isn't it His mercy for the times when He brings things out of darkness into light?

This is the third stage in history that we're looking at this morning in the relationship with the church and state because it's very important. It's the stage of the reformers. And goes pretty much at the time of the 16th century, it's when the people broke away from Rome. And there's a lot you could talk about at this stage too because like all these other ones, none of this happened by one instant. One scholar referred to the Reformation as an assault on the forces of darkness, with one bomb going off here and another one going off there. And one shell exploding on the beaches of France, and another one exploding in England, and another one exploding in Germany.

But when you put this together, there is a name that sticks out. And it's the name of who? I'm not going to show you the picture yet. You guys know who it is. Martin Luther, right? He is just the most pleasant looking person you've ever seen. You can't look at his picture and not smile a little bit. Listen, if you were doing the things he did, you'd probably be a little grouchy at times too, I guess. This is a famous portrait of him where he looks rather large. A friend of his said he never knew anybody who ate so little and weighed so much. He was temperate in some areas, not in others. He did not have a very temperate tongue. But he was born in 1483, to a family of coal miners that came from the lower classes in Germany. In fact, his dad realized very early on that he had a brilliant son, and so he wanted to send him to law school to make up for the coal mines. And so he could get him out of that difficult way of life.

But in his teenage years, Martin Luther got caught in a storm so he almost got struck by lightning, and he prayed to God, "If you get me through this, I will become a monk." And that's what he did. Be careful what you pray for. He survived the storm, he enters a monastery, and while he's there, Luther, in his own words, says he almost killed himself trying to be saved, trying to earn righteousness, trying to do all the things the Catholic Church said you had to do to go to heaven. He said, "If a monk could have been saved by monkery, he was me. I was a monk of all monks." Remember, Paul said, "I was the Pharisee of the Pharisees." That was Luther. He prayed, he fasted, he went days without sleep, all to work his way up to God on that ladder. And he said it just didn't help him. "The harder I tried, the more I thought God hated me. I thought He was my enemy."

And then one day, now he's a monk, he's brilliant. He becomes a scholar, who becomes a teacher, who becomes a professor who starts studying for sermons as an unconverted man. And as he's studying for a sermon, he reads Romans 1:17, which says, "The just shall live by faith," and it clicks for him. His world changed in an instant because he realized that salvation is *sola fide*, it's by faith alone, which was revolutionary at the time. People weren't teaching this. The apostles taught it in the first century, the early church believed it in the book of Acts, men like Polycarp held to this, but a lot of folks at this time had largely forgotten that. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be saved. You don't have to earn it. You don't have to work for it. You don't have to be a monk. Luther and other men at this time started believing this, embracing this, and they began to write about it.

And when I say write about it, I mean, they went crazy. The printing press had just been invented and look at the hand of God orchestrating things. The printing press had just been invented by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany in 1440. You see that? That means every time he wants to write a book, he doesn't have to have a bunch of monks do this and draw it all out. He can send it to the press. And so Luther star doing that, and he pours out a slew of books, like the *95 theses*. That was interesting because he actually didn't intend that one to be published; he nailed it to the door of the church in Wittenburg because that's what you would do to have a debate with scholars, and someone took it off the door and printed it. Another book was the *Bondage of the Will*. I'll list some of these here. There was the *Babylonian captivity of the Church*, which talked about how Rome held the church captive. He wrote *The freedom of a Christian, Three Treatises*. This one was the commentary on Galatians, which was his favorite book. He loved it so much that he thought he was almost married to it because everywhere he went, he carried Galatians with him. He called it his wife at times. I think that's a little bit weird, but that's Martin Luther.

And then there's the book at the end here. That's important for our discussion this morning, it was called *An Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. It was written in 1520. The reason it's important for our discussion is because it discusses the issue of the government. So if you want to know what Luther thought about the government, or at least what he was asking the German nobles to do, this was the book because he preaches the gospel to them in this book. He tells him to trust in Christ alone, and as he does that, he asked him to throw the pope out of the country. Here's some of the things that he said. He said, "Moreover, I should be truly glad if kings, princes, and all the nobles would take hold and turn the knaves from Rome out of the country. And keep the appointments to bishops and benefices out of their hands." In other words, make them stop putting pastors in the pulpit. He says, "Now may God who has tossed this empire into our lap, and charged you with ruling it, help us to live up to the name and rescue our liberty."

In other words, Luther is asking the German nobles, to take the country back into their own hands, so they can be free and rule their own nation, which they did. The nobles went along with this request. But at the same time, I need to point out to you that they held on to their Dominionism and the idea that the Church and State should be one. It is a very interesting thing that happens in history now and in a strange twist of fate, whereas the German nobles went out of the church in Rome, they go into their own country, and they start to take over the body of Christ themselves. They couldn't quite get it out of their thinking; this is the way they knew how to do things, so that's what they did. There's an interesting book if you're interested in learning more about this subject, written by a Dutch Reformed scholar named Leonard Verduin, which is called *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* where he wrestles with the question of why did Luther do this? Why did he set up a Christian state in the nation of Germany when he had a chance to stop it? Why did John Calvin do that in Geneva? Why did Ulrich Zwingli do this in Switzerland? Why did the men like the Puritans do this in England under Oliver Cromwell? And the only answer Verduin could come to is that in each of those scenarios, the power of the Catholic Church

was so great, they felt like if they didn't set up their own Protestant form of government, it would collapse, and the Reformation would fall into disarray. Which might be true; it's hard to know. But one thing we do know is that the reformers were very united on this principle. If you wonder, why is it that as a Protestant, this subject is so confusing, this is why. You're Protestant today. Your tradition comes out of the Reformation. You believe in faith alone. You trust in Christ alone. You hold the five *Solas* that Luther was so passionate about, but at the same time, this is some of the baggage of that legacy.

One time, just to show you kind of how Luther would go back and forth on this, he said that “Heretics must be converted with Scripture and not with fire. The souls, thoughts, and reflections are made to no one but to God. Therefore, it's impossible to compel anyone with physical force to believe this or that; religion must be adopted freely and not with force.” Can we all say amen to that? Preach it. I mean, you're right. You can't force someone to become a Christian. You can't tie them to the stake and say, “Believe or we're gonna burn you.” It doesn't work that way. Luther was right. The problem was he didn't stay on that position because at another time he said that “Heresy is in no case to be tolerated. A citizen is obliged if and when a heretic comes to him to inform his pastor as well as the magistrate. And if he does not listen to them, then it's off to the hanged man with the heretic.” Don't say amen to that. And you say, “Well, did Luther actually do that?” Yeah. So did Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and so did the Puritans. They would kill people for denying the principles of the Reformation.

One particular group that they picked on during this time were called the Anabaptists. They had a hard time during the Reformation. The word *ana* means again, and *baptist* means baptized. They were the people who were baptized again, in a sense. They didn't actually like that term, but that's what they were called. They were baptized or sprinkled as a baby, but when they came to faith in Christ later on, they saw in the Scriptures that they believed they needed to do it again, as a professing believer. So that's what they did. And the Reformers and the Catholic Church considered that treasonous. They didn't just consider it wrong doctrinally; they thought it was traitorous because you're baptized into the church and state in their mind. And if you renounce one baptism, it's just as good as renouncing the other relationship, and so they persecuted them. Ironically enough, they drowned a lot of them because they said, “You like water, okay. You can have all the water you want.” And they would take them to a bridge with a rope tied around their body, that's what this picture is. And they would throw them off of it or they would throw them out in a boat with a lead tied around their ankles, and they would just push them off. After a while the persecution became so bad for the Anabaptists that many of them fled to America, and established a colony called Rogues Island or Rhode Island. We'll try to talk about that some next week. Other ones would flee to other places and take up the name Mennonites after one of the most famous Anabaptist named Menno Simmons. I know we have a lot of people that come from that tradition in Chilliwack. Others would call themselves Amish after another Anabaptist named Jacob Ammann.

But the point in bringing this up is that it took a long time for the idea of Dominionism to make its way out of the churches. They held on to it for years after the Reformation. In fact, there's a lot of Protestant

Creeds that we still appreciate today that speak of this and you need to understand this so you can understand why the church wrestles with this. Because this line of thinking has permeated the body of Christ for years.

For example, if you grew up Anglican, some of you did. You might know that one of the principles of the 39 Articles of the Church of England that the Anglicans subscribe to said that the queen's majesty is the chief power in this realm of England and her other Dominions, whether they be ecclesiastical or civil, they the princes should rule all states and decrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be ecclesiastical or civil. Now, think about what that means for a minute. That means that everyone who subscribes to this agrees that the Queen or the King should rule over everything ecclesiastical or civil, spiritual or political, which means the king should be in charge of appointing pastors and overseeing church polity and carrying out church discipline. Now I know every Anglican doesn't believe that today. There's probably very few that do. But I bring it up to show this is how deep this runs in our history.

Another example of this would be found in the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is more popular today than the 39 Articles. It's written by the Puritans who were wonderful people in many ways, but it says, "The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and Sacraments or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Which is good. We would be in agreement. But it goes on to say, "Yet he hath authority and it is his duty to take order that unity and peace be observed in the church that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, and that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship be prevented, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered and observed." And I don't know if you picked up on that as you read the last part there, but what they're saying there is that it's not the government's job to preach the word; that's the church's job. But it is the government's job to make sure order is kept in the church and unity preserved, and heresy suppressed. Which makes you ask the question, well, how does the government suppress heresy? By violence. At least that's what they did in history. How do they keep unity? Well, they did it by arresting people, torturing some of them, killing some of them.

You say, "Did the Puritans do that?" Yes, they did. In fact, at one time, the Puritans felt so strongly about this, that they took over England under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell, and they executed the king. It's about 100 years after Luther his time. They meant every word of this document.

I could give you some other ones as well, if you're interested. The Belgic Confession, which is a document that many Dutch Reformed churches follow. It was written, I believe in Holland, published in 1561. It makes similar types of statements. I won't read all of that for the sake of time, but it does talk about at the end of this document, how the civil government may protect the sacred ministry, and thus may prevent and remove all false worship, that the kingdom of Antichrist may be destroyed, which again, makes you say, "Wait a minute, how do you destroy the kingdom of Antichrist as a government?" The same way. In fact, you don't protect the body of Christ in that thinking; you protect Christendom. And that's what we're talking about. You protect the Christian empire, you protect the Christian nation,

you protect the Christian government, *Corpus Christianum* versus *Corpus Christi*, which is not something every Dutch Reformed Church holds to, obviously, most of them don't, that's just the spirit with which these documents were written at the time.

And I bring all this up, all this history, all these creeds, all these people, to say this kind of thing has really saturated our thinking today. You can't really get away from it. Even now, you see it with people who look at America, and they call it one nation under God. Or they look at Canada, and they want to make it a Christian nation again. And I respect the sentiment of that. I appreciate the desire to help be salt and light in the country. But I've got to tell you something. There is no such thing in the Bible as a Christian nation. There's a Jewish nation. There's a kingdom of Israel, there's a kingdom of God. And there are Christians who can lead the nation. Don't we pray for that? And there are nations that can be built on Christian-Judeo values. But listen, Christianity is a spiritual thing. It's not political. And so you can't say someone is saved just because they're Canadian, or American or whatever. It doesn't work that way. You know, I have known so many Americans in my time, that were dead lost. And they were patriotic, they bled for the red, white, and blue. They gave everything for the flag, which is great. I respect that. I even have an American flag in my living room that was given to my grandfather in World War Two. I respect my country's heritage so much, but I will tell you, that flag did not save my grandfather. You're saved by Christ, in Christ alone.

Going back to what we said earlier, Jesus made this very clear at the beginning of Acts. The disciples asked him, "Lord, is it at this time you're restoring the kingdom?" And what does He say? He says, "No." He's not saying I'm not going to restore it. He's not saying it won't be here one day. He's just saying, "It's not here now, so don't look for it now." Don't go to Rome and make it the Holy Roman Empire now. Don't go to Germany and make it the German Christian nation. Don't go to countries today and try to take them over thinking it will solve all your problems; it will not. I promise you, if it didn't solve the problems of the people back then; it won't solve the problems now. We have to have a higher hand in mind, and that's the salvation of souls.

Now, this doesn't mean Christians cannot be involved in politics, and we're going to talk about that. And this doesn't mean that we are not to impact our world as salt and light. This doesn't mean you're not supposed to stand up to the government at times. Look, if you want to do something for me, I think it would be helpful for you to do. When this service is over, go home this morning and read the book of Acts. I just told you how confusing all this is right now because if you go online and Google things, you could have a million different subjects coming at you, and there's noise and music and messages and videos. Well just turn all that off, and open up the Bible and read what it says because when you do, you will see the church in Acts was bold, wasn't it? Those people were brave. They told the leaders like it was; they didn't back down. They said, "We must obey God rather than man." But at the same time, they didn't try to take over the nation because the Lord had other things in store for them.

There's a story of the time, Francis Schaeffer, he was a great apologist in the 1960s. He lived in Switzerland, I believe, but he was visiting a church in the U.S. that had a Christian flag and an American flag on the stage. I don't know if you've been in churches like that, they were very common where I grew up. And the pastor asked him and said, "Well, what do you think about that these flags, you know?" And Francis Schaeffer said, "I think you need to take the American flag off, not because I don't respect America, because I do. I just don't see the two things as synonymous because if there's ever a time in history, when America as a nation is lost, and taken over through war, or violence, or just some horrible catastrophe, I don't want your people's faith in Christ to go away with it. I want their faith in Christ to remain."

My friend, I think he's right. And we're going to be talking about that some more in this series. Please be praying for us. Like I said, we are trying to understand these things as best we can. We are going to spend a lot of time in Scripture, but I did want to talk to you some about this history, so you can understand where some of the different views come from and we will dive into the Bible not next time, but the time after. I do next time want to talk to you a little bit about the history of the U.S. and Canada, how they were formed as a nation because you live in North America. And you've all been impacted by that history, especially when it comes to the issue of government, so we want to take some time to discuss these things. But for now, let's close in a word of prayer and ask the Lord to bless the things that we've studied.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank You for the things we've talked about this morning. Anytime we dive into a subject like this one, we have to be very humble because this is 1,500 years of history. Much of it good, and much of it bad as well. Lord, this is the history of the church, and we need to take these things to heart. Lord, thank You that in Your Word, You have given us so much truth about how we are to handle every aspect of life. Not just our jobs, not just our families, but how to handle politics, government, disobedience, disagreements, the conflict that happens at times when the government goes way out of line. Father, the Scriptures give us insight into this. We want to study that together.

We also want to learn from those who have come before and so in that vein of things, Lord, I'm praying that that would be what's happened this morning. That our eyes will be open to what's taking place in history. We don't want to make the mistakes of the people in the past.

And Father as we say that Lord, we do pray for the nation of Canada right now. Lord, it's got such a unique history, the U.S. as well. You've done so many wonderful things. And You've brought us here into this nation in Your sovereign plan. This is not random that we're sitting here in Chilliwack, British Columbia worshipping You and praising You. You have set us here. We believe that. At the same time, Father, we do wrestle. Our hearts are breaking for the evil that's taking place among us. For the times our government has done things that are just not necessary to do and going after pastors or churches. And so what we're praying for Lord, is wisdom to approach these things moving forward; so we may be unified, and so we would honor You in these times.

Father, we pray for other churches. We know there are some here in Chilliwack and other places that are facing fines right now, other ones are having legal battles over different issues. We know there's Christians right now that are having to go to court over LGBTQ things and the list is endless. Father, may You uphold them. May we as a church, be brothers and sisters in Christ to those around us that are hurting, and may Jesus Christ be praised as we continue this series in the weeks to come.

Thank You for Christ. Thank You for the fact that He died for sinners. Thank You for the fact that He died for sinners from every nation. And we place these things in His hand, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.