



THE FINAL SUNDAY IN END TIME – CHRIST THE KING

When Church and State Intersect

A series of meditations on God's Word for Christ the King Sunday

Devotion #1

The phrase “separation of church and state” dates back to a 1802 letter Thomas Jefferson wrote to the Danbury Baptists Association of Connecticut. “I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.” Although the idea was around long before Thomas Jefferson, we’ve run with his phrase.

Although there are many blessings to keeping Church and State separate, these two entities can’t operate apart from each other. What happens when the Church and the State intersect?

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had to live this out. They were exiles from their home country of Judea and now lived under the Babylonian government, moving from a state that officially adhered to one true God to a government that honored and believed in many different gods. In integrating them to their new nation, King Nebuchadnezzar gave them new names to honor their gods. Daniel, whose name means “God is my Judge,” received the new name, Belteshazzar, meaning “Bel protect his life” to honor the deity they worshiped as the god of storms and fertility. Hananiah, which means “the LORD shows grace” was given the name Shadrach, meaning “Command of Aku,” and Mishael, whose name means “Who is what God is?” to Meshach, meaning “What is what Aku is?”, both in honor of the Sumerian moon-god. Azariah, whose name means “The LORD helps” was given the name Abednego, meaning “Servant of Nego,” the local deity of the art of writing and of vegetation.

Would you let your government give you a new name like that? Would you rebel? These 4 men did not. They allowed the Babylonians to call them whatever they wanted because their name did not change that they still believed and worshiped the one true God, the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the Almighty who made the heavens and earth and these Babylonians.

But then there was this matter of food that came from King Nebuchadnezzar’s table. It was not prepared according to God’s laws, probably included unclean food, and history tells us that all feasts at the king’s table were feasts in honor of their gods, that this food, this feasting, was worship. They would not break God’s explicit commands and eat this royal food from the Babylonians.

Listen, though, for how Daniel addresses this situation that he felt conscience bound to address. He respectfully declines. He doesn’t give ultimatums. He doesn’t run a smear campaign against King Nebuchadnezzar. The 4 men knew that they were now subjects of an ungodly government. They asked for a reasonable alternative, a test. Give us vegetables, grains, kosher foods, water, things that we know are in line with what our God wants for us. Give us 10 days of this. Then treat us in accordance with what you see.

God blessed their request and their actions. They were healthier than the rest. They were promoted. They lived and shared their faith in this pagan government. Their witnessing affected King Nebuchadnezzar, to the point where there is evidence that he may have come to believe in the LORD. Maybe even greater is that some 600 years later Daniel’s influence in the royal court endured to Magi coming to find the one born King of the Jews, one they came to worship as their king, bringing gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

When church and state collide and we live under a pagan government, we can still bring glory to God and share his Word. The conversations we have with people, how we live our faith within our country, can affect people for generations to come. How can you respectfully and rightly live your faith like these 4 men under our government when we as the Church intersect with the State?

Daniel 1:3-21 (NIV)

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king’s service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—⁴ young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king’s service. ⁶ Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. ⁸ But Daniel

resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.⁹ Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel,¹⁰ but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."¹¹ Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah,¹² "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.¹³ Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see."¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.¹⁵ At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.¹⁷ To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.¹⁸ At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service.²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.²¹ And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

This is the Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 234 on pages 6 & 7, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty."

Devotion #2

I'm really glad that Christ the King Sunday always falls in November, which happens to coincide with government elections. Although it's not a presidential election year, voting age citizens get to put their voice in for who they want as local leaders as well as state representatives.

But this democratic process may tempt us to put our hope in our choice of the right elected leaders or in the leader themselves, that the right politician will mean a better and more blessed life for us as the Church, that they would bring back Christian ideals, protect us from the sinful ways of the world.

Putting our hope, our faith, in our democratic process or elected leaders will leave us disappointed as we know how the game of politics is played. Special interest groups, lobbyists, they essentially buy votes, to get their way. Politicians are just as sinful as you and me and will not always vote selflessly and for the good of the people. Some will vote and influence based on what their lobbyists and supporters want, what will get them more power and control and wealth. Some will even do illegal things to serve themselves, not the people.

Thankfully, no matter who is elected into office, we know that we have someone in charge whose vote can't be bought, who doesn't play the game of you-scratch-my-back-I'll-scratch-your-back, who can't be swayed by money or power or control. No, he rules over all the earth with righteousness and faithfulness and justice and equity. He will judge the wicked and crooked politicians. They will have to answer to him when they have abused the authority that God has given to them.

When Church and State intersect, we take comfort in the fact that our God is the King of Kings, who reigns no matter who is in office, a God who will right every wrong, and will pay the price of the sins of politicians, and will faithfully judge all with equity.

Psalm 96:1-13 (NIV)

¹ Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. ² Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. ³ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. ⁴ For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. ⁵ For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. ⁶ Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary. ⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. ⁸ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. ⁹ Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. ¹⁰ Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. ¹¹ Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. ¹² Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. ¹³ Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.

This is the Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 250 on pages 8 & 9, "From All that Dwell Below the Skies."

Devotion #3

Knowing that an earthly government consists of sinners, some of which lobby, manipulate, do illegal things, selfish things, listen to anyone and anything over God, there is a desire for us to rebel against such representatives in our government, to ignore them, malign them, make fun of them, maybe even talk about how to hurt them. We sometimes make our obedience to our government optional. If I don't like that law, then I won't obey it. If I don't like that politician, what does it matter if I call them an idiot?

God's words through the Apostle Paul are sobering to our rebellious attitudes: "Be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established." (verse 1) If we rebel against our government, ignore them, make fun of them, etc., we're rebelling against what God has established and instituted, and we had better be absolutely right when we do so. Daniel lived under a pagan government who gave him a new name. He served that government but wouldn't compromise his faith to do it. Paul was Jewish and a Roman citizen. Yet, he didn't always make full use of his rights as a Roman citizen; he did when it served the proclamation of the Gospel, telling others the good news that Jesus lived perfectly for us, died on the cross to pay for our sins, and rose from the dead securing our freedom from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

As citizens of the United States, we get to criticize our politicians, protest them, impeach them, vote in new officials. While we get to enjoy these particular freedoms under our current government, our faith cannot remain separate in doing these things. Out of our faith in God, not faith in the government, we submit to our government authorities, pay them taxes, revenue - as legislated. We even respect them when we don't want to because the King of Kings is behind their office, that he gave them this authority over us. We don't just obey the authorities over us when they have earned our respect, after they have lived a spotless and honorable life, when we agree or like the laws that they impose. God gave these government officials their authority to benefit us, to do us good. Submitting to them often makes our lives better.

Need an example? Did you stop at a red light today? Did other people stop when their light was red and yours was green and thus you were kept from being t-boning at every intersection? That is a blessing that we have from God through our government. Our submission to that law benefits us and others. Think of the chaos and the injury and the death that would happen if we lived in anarchy, in rebellion against our government, and never submitted to a red light? Our government also provides us with so much more than traffic lights. Through them, we also have police officers, firefighters, EMTs, a military, public education, and the freedom to worship and advertise it to invite others to it.

Will there be times when we have to go against the government when they command something against God's expressed will? Absolutely, just like Daniel did when it came to eating the royal food. Thankfully, that's often the exception and not the norm.

When we do rebel and are right in line with God's Word for doing so, we also have to be ready to suffer the consequences that will come down from our government. This is what the Apostles did in the book of Acts. They rightly rebelled against their Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, who ordered them to stop preaching Jesus. They kept on sharing Jesus with whoever would listen, but they also submitted themselves to the punishment of the governing authorities for doing so. They were flogged and imprisoned for proclaiming Jesus and how he has set us free from sin, death, and hell, and they rejoiced over it.

We live with the same responsibility to our government, because it is God's servant for our good. God is still behind and has given authority to the sinners, the dishonorable, the shady, the unjust, the immoral, and he still calls us to submit to them as a timeless truth. When we pay taxes, when we stop at a red light, when we obey laws even when we don't like them, we honor the God who gave them their authority. When they command us to live contrary to God's Word, we rebel and submit to the consequences. This is how we live when we as the Church intersect with the State.

Romans 13:1-7 (NIV)

¹ Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. ⁴ For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

This is the Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 617 on page 10, "Christ, By Heavenly Hosts Adored."

Devotion #4

The Pharisees and the Herodians purposefully wanted to take Church and State and intersect them in order to trap Jesus. “Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” (verse 17)

On the one hand, the Roman coin, the denarius, had an image of Caesar on it along with the Latin inscription, “Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.” On the back of the coin, Caesar also claimed the title of “Pontifex Maximus,” which means the supreme pontiff or the chief of priests. Basically, Tiberius was claiming to be both the head of the state and the head of worship, the church. A true believer couldn’t submit to such a blasphemous king by paying him taxes, right?

On the other hand, if Jesus said that believers shouldn’t pay taxes, he would be called out by the political group called the Herodians who would have charged Jesus with rebelling against the lawful Roman government. He could be imprisoned, maybe executed. Ministry over.

Jesus didn’t give them an opinion; he pointed to reality. He asked for the coin used for paying the Roman taxes. The fact that they could produce one meant that they were already using Roman currency and submitting to their governing authority, enjoying the benefits thereof, much like Daniel did. So, Jesus wisely says, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” (verse 21)

Jesus says this to remind us that we live in two realms simultaneously: the earthly and the heavenly. Our allegiance is first and always to God – give to God what is God’s. But we also are bound to the earthly authority that he has established – give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.

And God didn’t just give us this principle to make our lives more complicated as Church and State intersect in our lives. When the time was right, God used a census of the pagan (and blasphemous) Roman government to fulfill his prophecy that the Savior of all nations would be born in Bethlehem. Jesus himself paid taxes, lived obediently under Roman law. God used the government later in Jesus’ life with the Jewish Sanhedrin falsely accusing Jesus and the Roman government unjustly carrying out his crucifixion so that our sins against our government are paid for, expunged from our records by his blood, paying our legal indebtedness before God. Jesus, our perfect substitute Savior, gave to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s. He did this for us in our place because we so often don’t.

Like our Savior, we too will serve our government and our God often at the same time by paying taxes, electing officials using the morality God has given us, influencing laws to be in line with God’s Word where possible. We live as a Christian under our government, whoever God gives authority to.

We remember that though God and government are separate, they also intersect in our lives all the time. Our job is not to rip them apart, but to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to give to God what is God’s. That’s what we do as we as the Church intersect with the State.

Matthew 22:15-22 (NIV)

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” ¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?” ²¹ “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” ²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

This is the Word of the Lord. We sing Hymn 351 on page 12, “Hail, O Once Despised Jesus.”