

## **SLIDE 1. ANCHORED: A Study of What We Believe and Why**

Teaching: **Article 12: Society and State**

*Sunday March 10, 2023*

### APPETIZER

A man heard about an operation which would enable him to get a new brain. He went to the hospital where the surgery had been perfected and asked the doctors what was in stock.

"Well," they said, "here is an excellent engineer's brain--a finely honed, precise bit of gray matter. It will cost you \$500 an ounce."

"What else?" the man wanted to know.

"This," they told him, "Is a lawyer's brain--a collection of shrewd, tricky little gray cells. It is \$1000 an ounce."

"Is that all you have?"

"No," they said. "Here is a doctor's brain, packed full of anatomical knowledge. It is \$5000 an ounce."

"I don't know," the fellow said. "Don't you have anything else?"

The doctors looked at each other then motioned for the man to step over to a covered container. "This," they said in hushed tones, "is a legislator's brain. It costs \$250,000 an ounce."

"Wow!" exclaimed the fellow. "Why so expensive?"

"In the first place," the doctors told him, "It is hardly used. In the second place, do you realize how many legislators you need to get an ounce of brains?"

Quoted by James Dent in Charleston, West Virginia, *Gazette*.

Cowboy, entertainer, and political commentator, Will Rogers, lamented the American political scene in his Washington newspaper column which ran from 1922 – 1934. He said these things then and there – among other things...

"I love a dog. He does nothing for political gain."

"Congress is so strange. A man gets up to speak and says nothing, nobody listens, and then everybody disagrees."

"The promising season ends on Election Day. That same night, the alibi season begins and lasts for the next four years."

Have things really changed in the last 100 years?

Is the political scene so different in Canada?

It's easy to be cynical about politics and state.

And it's a divisive and polarizing topic to discuss – such as this story illustrates...

An elderly gentleman was sitting on a park bench, basking in the sun, when another elderly man sat down beside him. They looked at each other for a moment but did not speak. Both men sat there, staring straight ahead.

After a while, one of them heaved a big, heartfelt sigh.

The other jumped up immediately and said, "If you're going to talk politics, I'm leaving."

So, what do we do?

How do we responsibly engage in the affairs of society and state as followers of Jesus Christ? *Bits & Pieces*, June 24, 1993, p. 7.

**SLIDE 2. "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool." Martin Luther King Jr.**

**SLIDE 3. What is our role as Christians in society and state?**

MAIN COURSE

The gospels make it pretty clear that Jesus came to this blue dot to – amongst other things – establish the kingdom of God – a non-geo-political kingdom – a kingdom where He is king, and his followers live their lives in faith and obedience to Him – a kingdom where people commit to live like Jesus lived – to be with Him, to become like Him, and to do as He did.

A decidedly distinct kingdom from the political state.

A kingdom – Jesus explained to Pilate – that is not of this world.

And yet Jesus never questioned the legitimacy of the state per se.

In fact, in that same conversation with Pilate - he said to Pilate that he would have no power over him – unless it was given to him from above (Jn. 19:10,11) – which is to say – unless it was given to him by God.

And so, Jesus taught His disciples and set the example to not offend the ruling powers.

**SLIDE 4. *After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?"***

**SLIDE 5. *"Yes, he does," he replied.***

**SLIDE 6. *When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes – from their own sons or from others?"***

**SLIDE 7. *"From others," Peter answered.***

**SLIDE 8. *"Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him. "But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake, and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it to them for my tax and yours"* (Mt. 17:24-27).**

And so, Jesus taught his disciples to give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar.

**SLIDE 9. *Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity.***

**SLIDE 10. *You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.***

**SLIDE 11. *Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay, or shouldn't we?"***

**SLIDE 12. *But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it."***

**SLIDE 13. *They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"***

**SLIDE 14. *"Caesar's," they replied.***

**SLIDE 15. *Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's"* (Mk. 12:13-17).**

Paul says much the same as Jesus...

**SLIDE 16. *Everyone must submit themselves to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established* (Ro. 13:1).**

Rebellion against such authorities, then, is tantamount to rebelling against what God has instituted – and those that do – will bring judgment on themselves.

**SLIDE 17. Paul goes so far as to say: *For he* (the one whom God has established to govern) *is God's servant to do you good* (Ro. 13:4).**

I choose to believe that those who enter politics – by and large – choose to do so for this reason: that they want to do good for their constituents – even if I am a little bit cynical otherwise.

**SLIDE 18.** And so – to our original question - **What is our role as Christians in society and state?**

**SLIDE 19.**

**1. Pray for government leaders.**

As Paul instructs Pastor Timothy to do with his church...

**SLIDE 20.** *I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness* (1 Ti. 2:1, 2).

So, thank God for our leaders, ask them how we could pray for them, and then - pray for them!

Why? As an example of how to live – like people who would call on God to help those who would lead us – and so that it would go well for us as a result! Win. Win.

How can we pray (when we have not yet made a request for specifics)?

a. Pray for their salvation – primarily for their benefit and then - for the benefit of those they lead – not praying for a Christian state – because – again – the kingdom of God is not coterminous with the secular state – and so they should never be one and the same.

b. Pray that God would give them strength and wisdom to lead.

A friend of mine – who lives in Ottawa – and spends a fair amount of time at the legislature – lamented (some time ago) how the once strong, on-site prayer support for Mr. Stephen Harper has all but evaporated for Mr. Justin Trudeau and his party.

Why? Because Mr. Harper is (maybe) a Christian? Because Mr. Trudeau (maybe) isn't?

Should it matter?

**SLIDE 21. What is our role as Christians in society and state?**

**2. Pay your taxes.**

No need to offend the ruling powers. Give to Caesar what is his. That kind of thing! Paul goes on to say in Ro. 13...

**SLIDE 22.** *Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor* (Ro. 13:7).

Give what you owe: money and... *respect*.

**SLIDE 23. What is our role as Christians in society and state?**

**3. Respect your leaders.**

You saw that there in that last verse: honor and... *respect*.

Not far down the road from here – there is a house that has a very large placard on it that reads, “F – Trudeau.”

This might be the way of a citizen of the secular state – to think and say such things – but it is not the way of a citizen of the kingdom of God.

No matter how you feel about our current Prime Minister!

**SLIDE 24. What is our role as Christians in society and state?**

**4. Obey the laws of the land.**

This is really basic – and smart – and practical - because non-compliance brings nasty consequences. But it is... more!

It is for reasons of conscience that we ought to obey the laws of the land.

Back to Ro. 13...

***SLIDE 25. He is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.***

***SLIDE 26. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience (Ro. 13:4-5).***

Which is to say – if we believe that God has instituted the governing authorities in our lives – then not obeying the laws of the land is to rebel against the leader God put in place – which then makes it an issue of conscience for followers of Jesus Christ.

UNLESS... the state demands a loyalty of its citizens that belongs to God alone – think – Daniel and his friends in Babylon!

Daniel and his friends were required to worship the image of a false god. They didn’t. His friends survived the fiery furnace – and Daniel the lion’s den (Dan. 3, 6)!

Sometimes, the state makes demands on its citizens to which believers – in good conscience – cannot comply.

Which is to say this: Though we are willing to give to Caesar what belongs to him, we are not willing to give to Caesar what belongs to God, ie. our ultimate loyalty and primary citizenship.

The bible calls that – idolatry!

And so, in such cases – the church must obey God rather than human authorities (as Peter and John put it in Acts 4:19).

To worship God alone (Dan. 6, 9). To talk and teach about Jesus Christ (Acts 4).

In other cases – however - the church should submit to governing bodies and maybe even endure “the pain of unjust suffering” (1 Pt. 2:19) and so follow in the footsteps of her Lord (1 Pt. 2:21).

COVID - for example. Some churches rejected the Public Health Orders, others didn't.

I think (and thought then) that COVID was a time when the church could and should submit to the laws of the land.

We were not being kept from worshipping God (as in the day of Daniel, for instance). We just couldn't meet in person for a time.

We were not disallowed to talk or teach about Jesus. We just needed to do so on the phone or online or on front porches :)

There are times, however, when the state will stand in opposition to the kingdom of God. Churches and individuals will need to – at such times – discern what they will submit to and what they won't – and in all cases – avoid extreme forms of nationalism.

### **SLIDE 27. What is our role as Christians in society and state?**

#### **5. To work for the good of all.**

It is our obligation as the church to seek the good of society.

**SLIDE 28.** Paul says: *...as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people; always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else* (Gal. 6:10, 1 Thess. 5:15).

**SLIDE 29.** *Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men* (Titus 3:1, 2).

**SLIDE 30.** Peter says the same: *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God...* (1 Pt. 2:12).

These texts are reminiscent of when Jeremiah encouraged the Israelite exiles in Babylon to be good citizens: to be productive, raise families, seek the peace and prosperity of their adopted cities, and pray for the well being of Babylon.

And that is what we will do. We're going to take a moment to pray for our federal, provincial and municipal governments. And here's how – with thanks and prayers for their salvation, strength, and wisdom! I'd like to invite you to pray this prayer for each person by name.

**SLIDE 31.** Lord, thank you for \_\_\_\_\_. I pray that they would come to now and follow you. Fill them with your strength and wisdom.

**SLIDE 32. Federal Leaders: Justin Trudeau, Jagmeet Singh, Pierre Poilievre.**

**SLIDE 33. Provincial Leaders: David Eby, Kevin Falcon, Sonia Furstenau, John Rustad.**

**SLIDE 34. Langley MPs: Tako Popta, John Aldaag. Langley MLAs: Andrew Mercier, Megan Dykeman**

**SLIDE 35. Langley City Mayor: Nathan Pachal. Langley Township Mayor: Eric Wooward.**

TAKE OUT

**SLIDE 36. Leader: God in His mercy established government to promote the well-being of all people.**

**SLIDE 37. Congregation: We commit ourselves to pray for our leaders, and to work for justice, truth, and righteousness in our homes, in our communities, and in all the nations of the world.**

**SLIDE 38. Congregation: We ask for the Spirit's guidance to make us keenly aware of those who suffer discrimination and injustice. In serving them, we are serving Christ.**

**SLIDE 39. Leader: God requires governments to uphold and bless what is good and restrain and punish what is evil.**

**SLIDE 40. Congregation: We commit ourselves to obey all laws that do not conflict with the Word of God. We grieve all acts of violence and all victims of evil. We deplore the loss of life that comes from violence.**

**SLIDE 41. Congregation: In the spirit of Christ, we seek to bring God's justice by reconciling victims and offenders. We seek to be truthful and gracious in all we say, avoiding the practice of swearing oaths, but letting our Yes be Yes and our No be No.**

**SLIDE 42. Leader: The citizenship of believers is in heaven, and God's Kingdom demands absolute allegiance.**

**SLIDE 43: Congregation: We seek the well-being of our governments but reject overbearing nationalism as an idolatrous claim for our loyalties, and an affront to the God of all nations.**

**SLIDE 44. We also reject membership in any secret society as an affront to the unity of the church of Christ. We commit ourselves to always live lives worthy of our heavenly citizenship, for it has been purchased for us with the priceless blood of Jesus.**