

CHRISTIANITY
and
AMERICAN
CULTURE TODAY

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF
RICHARD D. LAND

Edited by
MELTON B. WINSTEAD



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Essays in Honor of Richard D. Land
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To Richard D. Land, as a thank-you for decades of biblical guidance for Baptists and for all Christians and for an example of courageously defending the faith in the public square.

Dr. Richard Land served for a quarter of a century (1988–2013) as President of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) of the Southern Baptist Convention. Prior to that he served as Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Systemic Theology at Criswell College in Dallas, TX. From 2013–2021 Dr. Land served as President of Southern Evangelical Seminary (SES) in Charlotte, NC. Dr. Land was honored with the title President Emeritus by both the ERLC and SES upon his retirement from those institutions.

Dr. Land, a graduate of Princeton University (A.B. magna cum laude), Oxford University (D. Phil.) and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (Th.M.), has pastored or interim pastored 21 Baptist churches and delivered approximately 6000 sermons sine he answered God's call to ministry at age 16. He currently serves as Executive Editor of the Christian Post and hosts a daily weekday radio program called "Bringing Every Thought Captive."

Dr. Land and his wife have been married 51 years. They have 3 children, Jennifer, Richard Jr., and Rachel. Dr. Land is a native Houstonian and 6th generation Texan. The Lands reside in Franklin, TN.

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Barrett Duke is the Executive Director-Treasurer of the Montana Southern Baptist Convention. Prior to serving the Southern Baptist churches of Montana, Dr. Duke spent 20 years at the Ethics & Religious Commission with Dr. Richard Land, serving most of those years in Washington, DC as Vice President for Public Policy and Research and Director of the ERLC's Research Institute. He has spoken and written extensively on public policy issues to help Christians understand the Bible's teachings on the great moral and cultural questions of the day. He and his wife Denise have three grown children and live in Billings, MT where they serve in their local church and travel regularly across the state of Montana to minister to pastors and their wives.

J. Gerald Harris was a pastor for 41 years before becoming the editor of *The Christian Index*, the Baptist publication for the state of Georgia where he served for almost 16 years. Harris has written five books and currently preaches and writes for *Love Lifted Me Higher Ministries* (www.lovelifted-mehigher.org).

Daniel Heimbach serves on the faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary as Senior Research Professor of Christian Ethics. He is a scholar, writer, and social critic who works at the interface between Christian moral witness and secular culture and has written or contributed to over nineteen books and more than sixty articles and reviews. He advised Dr.

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Land as a research fellow for the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and founded the Christian Ethics section of the Evangelical Theological Society.

Chris Katulka is host and Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Today weekend radio program and assistant director of North American Ministries for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, a worldwide Christian organization headquartered in Deptford, NJ. He recently was the featured teacher in the six-part Common Thread DVD and regularly speaks in churches, at conferences, and at schools. Chris writes the editorial and author's articles for *Israel My Glory* magazine. He earned a ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary.

Chuck Kelley was the 8th President of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, serving from 1996 to 2019. He continues to serve at NOBTS as President Emeritus and Distinguished Research Professor of Evangelism. He is founder and director of Innovative Evangelism as well as an itinerant preacher and evangelist. He has written numerous books including *The Dilemma of Decline: Southern Baptists Face a New Reality*, *Fuel the Fire: Lessons from the History of Southern Baptist Evangelism*, and *The Baptist Faith and Message* (written with Richard Land and Al Mohler).

Paige Patterson, following forty-two years of presiding over three colleges and seminaries, serves as president of The Sandy Creek Foundation in retirement, traveling and preaching especially in seminaries and Bible schools overseas. He lives with his wife of fifty-eight years, Dorothy, in Parker, TX.

Tony Perkins, who is an ordained minister, remains active in Christian ministries and frequently fills pulpits across the country. He is a board member of Caring to Love Ministries, one of Louisiana's largest pregnancy resource centers. Tony is the immediate past president of the Council for National Policy. An effective communicator, Tony is the host of a daily,

nationally syndicated radio show, *Washington Watch* with Tony Perkins. He frequently appears as a guest on national news programs and talk shows. Tony holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Liberty University, a Master of Public Administration degree from Louisiana State University and was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity from Liberty University. He and his wife Lawana have been married since 1986 and have five children.

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Jim Showers is executive director and president of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, a worldwide Christian organization headquartered in Deptford, NJ. Dr. Showers speaks at conferences, churches, and schools nationwide, is a frequent participant in events supporting Israel, and is a strong advocate of the country's growing Jewish-Christian alliance. Jim authors "Inside View," a regular column featured in The Friends of Israel magazine *Israel My Glory*.

Mel Winstead teaches Biblical Studies at Southern Evangelical Seminary and pastors a small church in Marshville, NC. He and his wife and two daughters reside in Marshville, NC. Winstead's PhD in Biblical Studies is from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition to teaching and pastoral duties, Dr. Winstead speaks at apologetics conferences, leads local summer mission trips, and periodically helps with North Carolina Baptist Men's Disaster Relief (recovery and rebuild).

INTRODUCTION

What this book will do for you is inform, equip, and inspire you to a greater understanding of the relevance of biblical Christian faith. The chapters will enlighten you as to the scriptural command and necessity of Christians being involved in the politics of the nation of which they are a part and educate you as to what the hot-button issues are in ethics and morality in America today. Additionally, these pages will equip you to be able to knowledgeably, calmly, and kindly discuss these issues with your friends and co-workers. These chapters will also inspire you to practice discernment (to obey the scriptural command in 1 Thess 5:21 to “examine everything carefully”), concern yourself with the culture at large, and pray for the spiritual health of our neighbors and our nation. Finally, these chapters are here in honor of, and as a thank-you to, Richard D. Land for his dedication as a Christian leader, preacher, and defender of the faith for the last several decades.

Many of the contributors to this volume offered memoirs and accolades to Richard Land at the beginning of their chapter. Some authors applied their knowledge of Dr. Land’s expertise in the area in which they wrote. For example, Jim Showers wrote on Evangelical Support of Israel, knowing of Dr. Land’s support of Israel and the homeland for the Jews; Sharayah Colter wrote on the pro-life movement, knowing of Land’s fight

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against the horror of abortion in America; Daniel Heimbach wrote on the topic of religious liberty, knowing of Land's fight to preserve that blessing in America; Ronnie Rogers wrote on Critical Race Theory, knowing of Land's lifelong fight against real racism; and Paige Patterson wrote about being a historian, ethicist, politician, and evangelist, realizing Land's enormous contributions in these areas.

The other chapter topics, in no particular order, include: The Crous-es' covering Christian leadership which Land has modeled over the years; Mark Coppenger covers Christian ethics; Michael Brown covers the stealth agenda of the homosexual movement; Mel Winstead offers the relevance of the Bible to the topics of abortion, homosexuality, and social justice, knowing Land has worked to right these wrongs for years; Chuck Kelley covers the topic of what it means to be a Southern Baptist, a topic always close to Land's heart; Mark Ballard reviews the book *Citizen Christians* that Land co-edited some years ago and notices its continual relevance; Barrett Duke, Tony Perkins, Jimmy Draper, and Gerald Harris each tackle the issue of Christians and politics, each from a different angle (if I was not previously convinced of the biblical directive for Christians to get involved in the nations they find themselves in, I would definitely be convinced after reading these chapters).

And so, this book is dedicated to Richard D. Land on the occasion of his 75th birthday. Dr. Land currently lives in Tennessee, recently retiring as president of Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, NC. Dr. Land has led the way in defending and explaining the Bible and its application to Christian values to the public and to public policy for the last several decades.

Richard Land served as the President of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention for a quarter of a century (1988-2013). He appeared on *Meet the Press*, *Face the Nation*, and *The O'Reilly Factor* numerous times, as well as ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox News in addition to being interviewed by PBS and CNN many times. A prolific author, debater, and preacher, he has deftly applied the truths of the Bible

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to a myriad of ethical, political, and moral issues of our great nation. His has been a truly prophetic voice in a wasteland of sentimentalism and relativism.

After deciding to honor Dr. Land for his lifelong and unique Christian service, I thought it best to ask for essays from other conservative Christian leaders. Some I had in mind already, some couldn't oblige at the time because of other writing deadlines, and others were recommended to me by Dr. Land's wife, Becky. She heartily helped me by giving me names of people she knew would be a part of the project and by securing the contacts for several of the writers.

Richard Land has helped Christians and Baptists specifically to develop a biblical perspective on the issues covered herein. Hopefully, that task will continue in these pages.

CHAPTER 1

A CHRISTIAN'S STEWARDSHIP RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD GOVERNMENT

Tony Perkins
Kenyn Cureton

Dr. Land,

In America's decades long cultural conflict, our movement has been blessed to have you as an articulate ally and field general. God gifted you with the mind of a scholar, enabling you to stand toe to toe with any among the intellectual elite in making a compelling case for the biblical worldview. At the same time, God gifted you with the heart of a pastor, enabling you to communicate God's word clearly and powerfully to people in the pews. You have been a favorite as a speaker for our Watchmen network of pastors and as a guest on Washington Watch radio. I count it an honor to lock arms with you in the ongoing battle for the soul of America.

* * *

What is a Christian's stewardship responsibility when it comes to government? That question continues to be the source of intense debate among various faith communities. Yet the Bible provides the answer. God established three institutions: the family, the church, and the civil government. The Apostle Paul states in Rom 13:1: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."¹ Then Paul enumerates several

¹ While there may be references to Scripture in this chapter, any actual citations are from the ESV, unless otherwise noted.

responsibilities (vv. 2-7). In his first letter, Peter does the same (2:13-17). Indeed, Jesus Himself speaks of our obligation to civil government (Matt 22:21). Therefore, Christians have a stewardship responsibility regarding the divinely ordained institution of government, which is a part of our biblical worldview as believers.

What is a worldview? A worldview is the “big picture”—the basic set of presuppositions, beliefs, convictions from which we look at and make sense of the world. Think of it like a pair of tinted sunglasses that color how the world looks to you. For example, if you look at the value of human life through biblical glasses tinted with the belief that we are the unique creation of a loving God, you will arrive at one view of abortion. However, if your glasses are tinted with the belief that man simply evolved because of chance, and we are therefore no different than the animals, you may arrive at another view of abortion. Your worldview matters!

What is a biblical worldview? At the core of genuine Christianity is a personal relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord. What the Lord Jesus expects of His followers is articulated in the Bible. Those biblical teachings should determine the way we see and understand all reality. So, a biblical worldview is a set of presuppositions, beliefs, and convictions defined by Scripture and shaped by our relationship with Christ.

While a bare majority of Americans (51%) claim to have a biblical worldview, unfortunately only 6% of Americans do. This according to a recent national survey of over 2,000 adults conducted by the Cultural Research Center, which is led by George Barna, Senior Research Fellow with Family Research Council’s Center for Biblical Worldview.² While good news was difficult to find in the survey, here was one bright spot: Among the seven out of ten adults who believe that God does (or might) exist, fully 78% say that God cares “a lot” about what they believe and do in relation to every dimension of society. That finding lines up with biblical truth. In-

2 “American Worldview Inventory 2021 Release #1: America’s Dominant Worldview Syncretism,” accessed May 26, 2021, https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CRC_AWVI2021_Release01_Digital_01_20210413.pdf?bcs-agent-scanner=b27763e2-1804-f644-9301-bbb50f377bce.

deed, Jesus made it abundantly clear that His followers are to influence and impact the entire earth and the whole world.

INFLUENCE AND IMPACT AS SALT AND LIGHT

One of the clearest examples of Jesus commanding His followers to influence the world is in Matt 5:13-16. There Jesus uses two metaphors, parables in miniature that are so basic, so fundamental to life to describe the very essence of what we are to do and to be as His followers in relation to every dimension of society. We are to influence and impact all of it as the “Salt” and the “Light.”

Salt

Jesus declared: “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet” (Matt 5:13).

Salt is essential to life

Without salt, the fluids in our body could not be kept in proper balance. Consequently, pure salt was a valuable commodity in the ancient world. In the Greek world slaves were bought with salt, and in the Roman world soldiers were paid with salt. We even get our English word “salary” from the Latin *salarium*,³ meaning salt. If you have ever wondered where the phrase: “He is not worth his salt” came from, now you know. There is an abundance of salt in the world. The oceans contain 1/4 pound of salt for every gallon of water. If that salt were not present, the oceans would become a rotten cesspool. The Greek writer Homer referred to it as “that divine salt,” meaning that salt was as essential to maintaining physical life as the divine is for the spiritual life. Salt is essential. When Jesus called us salt

³ Walter W. Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980), 460.

(and light), He meant this: “You are indispensable for what I want to do in your world.”

Not only is salt indispensable. Its vital function is only performed when it is made available – when it is “sacrificed.” Salt does what it does in the dissolving; it does what it does by giving of itself. Only when it is dissolved does it perform its function and make an impact. Salt exercises its influence by the sacrifice of itself. We will make an impact on our community and the culture, on education and government, etc. only to the extent that we make ourselves available and give ourselves to be used of God.

Salt penetrates

Take a pinch of salt, sprinkle it in a glass of water, and it will penetrate and permeate the entire glass. Unfortunately, since many have erected that “wall of separation” between the sacred and the secular, many come to church on Sunday and think that is the end of their responsibility. However, Jesus didn’t call us to be the salt of the Sunday School or the salt of the church sanctuary. Jesus called us to be the salt of the earth! As the salt of the earth, we must penetrate and permeate all of it: our neighborhood, our community, our culture, or our society—every human institution and endeavor, including government.

Salt promotes flavor

As salt lends flavor to food, the Christian is to lend flavor to life. From the world’s perspective, Christianity takes out all the flavor of life. We do not need to be the bland leading the bland. Jesus was not that way at all. Jesus Himself said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10b). He was so magnetic and winsome that the common people flocked to hear Him. As Jesus brought out the full flavor of life for those around Him, so should we as His disciples in every sphere of society.

Salt preserves

Salt holds in check the corruption and retards the rot. Jesus lived in a day before refrigeration and freezers, so salt was the only element readily available that prevented food from going bad. Salt preserves from

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contamination, salt delays decay. As followers of Christ, we must therefore act as a preservative influence, to stem the tide of corruption, to stand against impurity, to defeat the decay, to retard the rottenness of this world. That preservative and preventative influence needs to be brought to bear on entertainment, education, business ethics, the media, politics, the arts – in every level and area of life. Jesus is saying in verse 13 that our righteous presence is essential to prevent decay and rottenness in our world. We have much work to do in America!

Salt purifies

Salt has a medicinal quality to it. Yet while it heals, it hurts. Have you ever gotten salt into a cut or wound? It stings and burns, doesn't it? When the truth of God's word is rubbed into the open wounds of a sinful society, a corrupt culture, a government with gangrene, it will sting and hurt before it can heal. The salty prophet Elijah was certainly an irritation to the wicked political leader King Ahab (1 Kings 18:17-18). When we function as salt, our very presence will irritate people who are of the world. Jesus said: "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you" (John 15:18-19). Salt irritates. It burns even as it purifies and brings healing.

Salt also becomes polluted (v 13b)

Did salt ever lose its saltiness? Yes. In the ancient world salt was often collected in an impure state with other chemicals. As it was subjected to moisture or heat, a reaction would take place that would alter the chemical make-up of the salt so that it was no longer salt! It was salt that had "lost its taste." What is Jesus saying? Salt-less salt represents our loss of influence by accommodating to the ways of the world, the corruption of the culture, and the sins of society.

Someone has said: "I looked for the church – and found it in the world. I looked for the world and found it in the church." That's more truth than poetry. However, Jesus said we are to be in the world but not of the world (John 17). We are to penetrate the culture, but not to partake of it. We are

to engage the culture, not entertain it. We are to challenge and change the culture, not compromise with it. The judgment Jesus pronounced here is startling. Jesus said: “It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.” Salt that lost its saltiness was worthless. When salt loses its salinity, it is irreversible. There is no remedy. There is only one recourse: Throw it out!

We spend a fair amount of time casting blame for the moral mess in which we find ourselves in America. Talk radio is a daily torrent of the blame game. Some say: “It’s Hollywood and the social media giants promoting ungodly lifestyles.” Others say: “It’s the LGBTQ activists tag-teaming with educators, promoting their radical agenda.” Others say: “It’s the abortion advocates and their paid politicians promoting the murdering of innocents.” Still others say: “It’s the cultural Marxists together with renegade judges disrespecting and even removing our First Amendment freedoms.” Others say: “It is the social media giants, spreading lies and propaganda.” Certainly, they are all doing their part, but do you know what the biggest problem is in America? Where a large part of the blame lies? As much as any other group, the blame for the moral crisis in America needs to be laid at the feet of salt-less saints. Their salt has lost its savor in a culture that is rotting and a world that is headed for hell!

God help us to take up the challenge Jesus gave us to be salt. Not just the salt of the Sunday School or the salt of the church sanctuary, but the salt of the earth. Salt that penetrates and permeates all areas of life. Salt that preserves society from judgment by retarding the rot of sin. Salt that prophetically irritates and burns but, in the end, brings healing. If there was ever a day, if there was ever a time for us to function as the salt of the earth to make an impact on our world, now is the day, now is the time!

Light

Then Jesus offers the second of this twin illustration of our influence in every dimension of society, including culture and government: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in

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the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:14-16).

Light is also the essence of what we are to do and to be as Christ-followers in the world around us. The Bible tells us plainly not only that God is love but also that God is light (1 John 1:5; 4:16). Jesus said of Himself: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12). Light reveals, light exposes, light illumines, light guides, light warms, light penetrates and conquers the darkness.

Light is essential to life

The light of the sun powers the food chain. It is essential to the process of photosynthesis that enables plants to grow which in turn become our food and food for the animals we use for food. Life cannot exist without light. Again, this points out how indispensable our influence is in the world. Scientifically speaking, light is energy, and energy is the ability to do work. When the light of Jesus Christ shines, things begin to happen. Sin is exposed. The way of salvation is revealed. Truth is proclaimed. Life is transformed. Light has a tremendous influence, but there are two areas for further explanation.

Light reveals

John described Jesus as “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:9). Jesus is the great revealer of truth because He is Truth (John 14:6). Light brings revelation: sometimes negative (exposing sin), sometimes positive (revealing truth). God’s word is a flaming torch of divine revelation. The psalmist said: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105).

Yet our generation stumbles in the darkness asking with Pilate: “What is truth?” Our generation is “always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7), so much so that the vast majority of Americans now believe Satan’s lie: “There is no such thing as absolute truth.” In other words: “Truth for you may not be truth for me; truth is in the eye of the beholder.” Or in the words of the popular meme: “Live your

truth” as if each person can define it for themselves. This confusion about truth is nothing new. The church father Augustine wrote:

Why does truth call forth hatred? Why is Your servant treated as an enemy by those to whom he preaches the truth, if happiness is love, which is simply joy in truth? Simply because truth is loved in such a way that those who love some other thing want it to be the truth, and precisely because they do not wish to be deceived, are unwilling to be convinced that they are deceived. Thus, they hate the truth for the sake of that other thing which they love because they take it for truth. They love the truth when it enlightens them, they hate truth when it accuses them. Because they do not wish to be deceived and do wish to deceive, they love truth when it reveals itself, and hate it when it reveals them.⁴

Chuck Colson brilliantly related the quest for truth back to the Christian worldview:

Genuine Christianity is a way of seeing and comprehending all reality. It is a worldview. The scriptural basis for this understanding is in the creation account, where God spoke everything into being out of nothing (see Gen 1 and John 1:14). Everything that exists came into being at his command and is therefore subject to him, finding its purpose and meaning in him. The implication is that in every topic we investigate, from ethics to economy, to ecology, the truth is found only in relationship to God and his revelation.... In every area of life, genuine knowledge means discerning the laws and ordinances by which God has structured creation, and then allowing those laws to shape the way we should live. As the church fathers used to say, all truth is God’s truth.⁵

4 Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Frank Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 191.

5 Chuck Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999), 15.

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In our day, people need to understand that truth is not what one says it is, truth is not what one thinks it is, truth is what God's word says it is. Jesus prayed to the Father: "Your word is truth." (John 17:17). God's word has the answer to every moral crisis we face as a nation. Do you want to know the truth about abortion? The Bible says that God hates the shedding of innocent blood (Prov 6:17). Do you want to know the truth about LGBTQ behavior? The Bible says it is among the list of sins under the judgment of God (Lev 18:22; Rom 1:18-32). Do you want to know the truth about why our education system is failing and why we have kids killing kids and babies having babies? We've kicked the Light of the world out of the classroom. Ps 119:130 says: "The unfolding of your words gives light!" We must become defenders and revealers of the truth. We are to be that light that shines on the path that leads up and out of the darkness and the deception of sin.

Light overcomes

John 1:5 speaks of Christ and says: "The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not" (KJV). Some understood the light, and some did not. Why? Choice. However, the KJV does not completely do John 1:5 justice. A better rendering is "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (ESV). The NLT has "could not extinguish it." The darkness could not put it out. All the darkness of this world and of hell itself could not and cannot put out the light of Jesus Christ!

You are the light

Being light is our responsibility as Christ-followers. Jesus said: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12), and then He passed the torch to the Church and said: "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:14-16). It is a fundamental principle that we must impact our world as Jesus did and be lights in the darkness. Translated from the original text, v 14 reads: "You and you alone are the light of the world." God instructs us to shine His light in this sin darkened world. We can't pass the buck. It is our exclusive responsibility. If we don't shine, who is going to? It is our duty, our privilege, our exclusive responsibility.

It is also an inclusive responsibility. This verse can read: "You, all of you, are the light of the world." There are no pinch hitters, no hired guns in

the kingdom of God. Nobody can do it for you. You, every one of you, are the light of the world. I have a sphere of influence you could never have. You have a sphere of influence that I could never have. So, the responsibility to reach people living in and practicing darkness rests squarely upon each of us and all of us. Now we realize this may be intimidating, but God gives all of us certain talents and abilities according to His divine purpose for our lives. You may not have the passion of a Luther, the brilliance of a Calvin, the eloquence of a Spurgeon, the faith of a Mueller, the zeal of a Moody, or the renown of a Billy Graham – but you can shine where God has placed you. While our abilities and circumstances may all be different, as Jesus communicated in the parable of the minas in Luke 19, we’ve all been given the same opportunity to faithfully serve.

One might say, “Well I’m not much, I can’t speak well, I can’t sing, I don’t have a lot of money, I’m not all that smart or gifted.” It does not matter – just let your light shine! Remember, it is not your light, it is His light anyway! God has calibrated your watts. So, whether you are a candle glowing softly in a home or a laser beam that can cut the gates of Hell off at the hinge, turn on the light! He has given you unique talents and abilities that He expects for you to use to bring Him glory.

Several years ago, Chuck Colson told a story about Ron Greer, an ex-offender who once hated all white people, but was radically saved and is now a pastor in Madison, Wisconsin:

Greer was dismissed from his regular job at a fire department for passing out Christian tracts describing homosexuality as a sin. Madison’s homosexual activists were enraged and stormed into Greer’s church, disrupting the service, throwing condoms at the altar, and shouting obscenities. Ron Greer responded by graciously inviting them to join in the worship service. Later, when the press asked how he had kept his cool, he smiled and said: “I have no more reason to be angry with them than I would with a blind man who stepped on my foot.” Precisely. Most of those who object to Christianity are simply spiritually blind and our job is to lovingly bring them into the light.⁶

6 Colson and Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?*, 32–33.

Light of the world

Don't miss *where* Jesus wants us to make an impact as light. It is the world. One of our greatest obstacles in the contemporary church is that the greatest concentration of salt and light is in the church building from nine until noon on Sunday morning. I say again, Jesus didn't call us to be the salt of the Sunday School and the light of the church, but the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The "world" means out in the businesses, the classrooms, the halls of government, the school boards, the neighborhoods, and communities—that is where we retard the rot and dispel the darkness. So, we need to understand that the church is not primarily the place of ministry, it is the base of ministry.

Even as Jesus spoke these words, 100 miles to the south near the Dead Sea was the Qumran Community, which produced the Dead Sea Scrolls that were discovered back in 1948. The Qumran Community was made up of men and women who had left Jerusalem and retreated to the desert near the Dead Sea. They said: "We're going to save Jerusalem by getting out of Jerusalem and starting a commune out here in the desert." One of their teachers even wrote a book called the "Sons of Light" about a battle between the sons of light and the sons of darkness.⁷ Jesus may well have had these folks in the back of His mind when He spoke these words, for you see it is not by removing ourselves from the world that we can retard the rot and dispel the darkness—it is the very opposite. Our Lord said: "You are to go back to the very world I called you out of and there you are to be salt and light."

Certainly, these are dark days in America. The Bible says that "men loved the darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). The forces of darkness have succeeded in bringing down the light of truth and reason found in God's word and have plunged our nation into a moral gloom. Arnold J. Toynbee, in his multi-volume *Study of History*, concluded that the average civilization was 200 years old when it collapsed. He clearly demonstrated that out of the previous 21 civilizations that 19 of them were destroyed from within – by atheism, anarchy, materialism, socialism, immorality, etc. America is nearly 250 years old, and it may be that the

⁷ Theodor H. Gaster, ed., *The Dead Sea Scriptures in English Translation with Introduction and Notes* (New York: Anchor Press, 1976), 399–423.

closing chapters of this once great nation are being written today because they are being dominated by the prince of darkness and because there is an appalling absence of light. The sun seems to be setting on America.

Unfortunately, many Christians are getting used to the dark. There is a slow, subtle, sinister brainwashing process going on whereby we are gradually being desensitized to the dimming conditions of our culture. Little by little, sin has been made to appear less sinful. No more black and white, just a dingy shade of gray.

There can be no fellowship between light and darkness. There can be no agreement between good and evil. When the world wants you to “Coexist” as the bumper sticker suggests, what they want you to do is crucify your conscience and compromise with evil. In this dark day, it is time to take a stand. Stop cursing the darkness and turn on the light! Stop whining and start shining!

Light is not to be hidden

We are to impact our world like light, but too many Christians suffer from *photophobia* – they are afraid to shine. They are so fearful of being offensive that they are no longer effective in making an impact in the culture and on our government. So, they would rather grieve the Holy Spirit than grieve the godless. In fact, many have chosen to become “Undercover Christians” and “Secret Saints.” Yet Jesus did not allow that option, commanding: “What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops” (Matt 10:27). Indeed, notice His similar statement in Matt 5:15: “Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.”

Palestinian houses usually had only one window, about 18 inches square, if it had one at all. The lamp was a clay boat filled with oil with a floating wick, usually held up by a branch. The bowl spoken of here is an earthenware grain measure. The point is simple: You would not light a lamp just to put it under a clay jar – you don’t obscure the light if you want to see. That is silly, it is absurd, it is senseless. Neither does it make sense to say in your heart: “I belong to Jesus, the Light of the world, and I know He wants me to be a light in my world,” and then to deny it by your words

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and deeds. When we were saved, we were saved to shine! Christ loved us so much that He was unashamed to die naked and nailed to a cross before a mocking world. He didn't keep His love for us a secret. He let it shine for all the world to see.

We are not to keep our love for Him a secret. Jesus said: "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (Matt 10:32-33). Do people know that you are a follower of Christ or are you hiding your light under a bowl? He wasn't ashamed to die for us; can we continue to be ashamed to live for Him? No. Let your light shine!

Back in verse 14, He says: "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." What we are and who we are is ultimately self-evident. It is an eternal principle that the essence of what and who we are will eventually come out. It has been said that "What you are screams so loudly that I cannot hear what you say." Our Lord seated on a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee probably pointed over at the hilltop city of Safed that had a beautiful, white-washed wall that was visible for miles around. And the point He's making is this: "If you are light, you will shine." So don't cower in the darkness – turn on the light!

How do we turn on the light?

In Matt 5:16, the text literally reads, "Let your light shine in their very faces." Now this is not talking about a kind of Academy Award religion, putting on a show to be seen of men. That is not what Jesus had in mind. Notice He says: "Let your light shine." That involves surrender. Let it happen. When you get right with God by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, and when Jesus becomes your Lord, and when you are filled with the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit, you don't have to make yourself shine, you will shine. You don't have to force it, fake it, or manufacture it, just let it happen. If you force it, it will cause a glare and not a glow. Be like Moses who went up on the mountain and met with God, day after day. So much so that the glory of God was reflected in his face, and when he came down the people were terrified. However, he was oblivious to the shine (Ex 34:29). He didn't force it, fake it, or manufacture it. He just let it happen.

Spend time with the eternal Light and you will shine too.

Then notice in verse 16: “Let your light shine...so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. The word translated as “good” means winsome, attractive, deeds of such pristine moral and spiritual beauty that all who see them will be compelled to give glory to God. I think our Lord had the kind of life He described in the Beatitudes. The kind of life He described in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. The kind of life He Himself lived. It was a life of winsome, attractive, beautiful deeds that compelled people to give glory to God. They were drawn to the Light.

Turning on the light in our world requires a similar approach. We need to be able to communicate biblical truth in terms that the secular person can understand. We need to get a handle on the spiritual beliefs or lack thereof and show how God’s word provides a superior worldview and way of life. And as much as we enjoy Christian fellowship, we cannot win the lost until we get out among them. We need to form intentional relationships with unbelievers for the purpose of bringing them to Jesus Christ. Do you know some people who are unsaved or unchurched? Love them enough to pray for them, invite them to dinner, take them a dessert, drive them to the doctor, keep their kids, pick up their mail, mow their lawn when they are on vacation, etc. Then strike up a conversation about spiritual matters and let your light shine! Jesus rubbed shoulders with sinners, and we need to do the same because He is our example in these matters. He was a beacon of light to those who were stumbling in darkness and now He has passed the torch to you. You are the light of your workplace, your classroom, your neighborhood, your city council, your state and national government. You are the light of this world.

Again, light doesn’t stop at the doors of our home. It shines brightly in the neighborhood. Light doesn’t stop at the doors of education. It shines brightly at school board meetings. Light doesn’t stop at the doors of the city municipal building. It shines brightly at the city council meetings. Light doesn’t stop at the doors of the state or U.S. Capitol buildings. It shines brightly in the offices of elected officials and in the halls of government. We can’t simply sit in our holy huddles and curse the darkness. We must turn on

the light! We must stop whining and start shining! Let your light so shine before others so that they see your good works and praise your Father in Heaven until the light of the glory of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea!

Salt and Light—Together

Christians must function both as salt and light if we would exert the influence and make the impact Jesus intended. Dr. Richard Land offers a brilliant summary of how and why salt and light must work together:

The idea that there are two Gospels, a social Gospel and a spiritual Gospel, was hatched in the pits of hell. There is only one Gospel, and it is a whole Gospel for whole people. It is a denial of the Gospel for Christians to seek to feed the hungry and not tell people about the bread of life. It is a denial of the Gospel to seek to house the homeless and not tell them that in our father's house are many mansions. It dishonors the incarnation of our Savior to talk about the bread of life and heaven and be insensitive to the fact that our hearers are hungry and homeless and thirsty. Jesus has commanded Christians to be both salt and light. Salt is defensive in that it stops the decay and the degradation. Light is offensive: it dispels the darkness and illuminates the path. There are limitations to what the law can do. You can't legislate revival or reformation. However, if revival and reformation occur, they will be reflected in legislation and society's values. The salt of the law can change actions, but it's only the light of the Gospel that can change attitudes. The salt of the law can change behaviors, but only the light of the Gospel can change beliefs. The salt of the law can change habits, but only the light of the Gospel can change hearts.

Here is the way it's supposed to work. We as Christians share our faith and, when people come to know Jesus as Savior, their worldviews should change. When those with biblically informed worldviews reach critical mass, they then can begin to influence

legislation. That's not called a theocracy, that's called the democratic process. It's the way slavery was eventually abolished. It's the way racial segregation was banished from the law. And it's the way Christians can restore once again to America a biblically based legal system that protects all human life from conception to natural death and everywhere in between.⁸

Being salt and light is not an “either/or” but a “both/and” proposition. If we exercise our influence in the proper balance, we can have enormous influence and make a tremendous impact for the kingdom of God.

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

We have examined our impact as salt and light, but are there some specific responsibilities that Christians have as citizens of America? Jesus Himself gave us guidance. In Matt 22:15-21, the religious leaders were trying to trap Jesus on the issue of paying taxes, but Jesus turned the tables on them. He asked them for a coin, and then asked whose portrait and inscription was stamped on it. They replied: “Caesar’s.” Jesus responded: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (v. 21). His point? All citizens—including His followers—are obligated to support their government. As a matter of fact, He had even sent Peter fishing to hook the one fish that had the very coin in its mouth to pay the tax for Peter and Himself (Matt 17:24-27)!

Obviously, we are not citizens living under a Roman regime, yet the principles of stewardship and obligation apply. Americans are blessed to have, as Abraham Lincoln put it, a “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”⁹ Ever noticed that the original parchment of the Constitution

⁸ Richard Land, *For Faith & Family* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2002), 195-196.

⁹ Abraham Lincoln, “Address at Gettysburg,” delivered on November 19, 1863, as found in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Roy P. Basler (Rutgers University Press, 1953), 7:22.

begins “We the People” in big, bold letters? Our form of government requires our active involvement. In fact, Maryland delegate James McHenry tells of an encounter Ben Franklin had with a Mrs. Powell, as the Constitutional Convention ended in 1787. “Well Doctor what have we got, a Republic or a monarchy?” she asked the oldest of the Founding Fathers. You can almost see the twinkle in his eye, as he peered over his spectacles and quipped: “A Republic, if you can keep it.”¹⁰ Wise old Ben Franklin knew that Republics were not easy to keep. Consequently, our Republic was designed for participants not spectators.

How can we “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” and fulfill our stewardship responsibility as Christians who are citizens in America today? There are numerous applications, but we will focus on a few things that every Christian ought to give our government. Here are some specific responsibilities:

Prayer

Paul instructed: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1Tim 2:1-4). We are to pray for our president, our congressmen, our judges, our governors, our mayors, our councilmen, our law enforcement officials, etc.—for all who have a place of authority. We don’t pray that they would continue in their wickedness, but we do pray that God would give them wisdom—the wisdom to lead our nation according to Judeo-Christian principles rooted in biblical authority. Above all we pray that they would come to Christ, become His followers, and be saved (v 4). It is only through a relationship with Jesus as Lord that they will lead in such a way that we as believers can live “peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (v 2).

Respect

¹⁰ Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, 3 vols., (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1911), 3:85.

Peter instructed: “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” (1 Peter 2:13-17). The Greek word for “submit” means to fall in rank under an authority. Government exists to keep order, and we must submit to the rule of law. Peter says that the authorities are commissioned to punish wrongdoers and commend the do-gooders (v 14; cf. Rom 13:2-5). Then Peter says that we are to show these authorities honor or respect (v 17).

Sometimes respecting our government is a challenging task. However, if we think it is bad in our day, just think about who was in charge when Peter wrote this: Nero. Ever noticed that we name our sons Peter but our dogs Nero? Nero wasn’t exactly an altar boy. In fact, Nero was a brutal, wicked ruler who was likely responsible for the deaths of both Peter and Paul. Yet, God’s word says that we are to respect the governmental authority, for if we rebel against it, we are in fact rebelling against the God who ordained it (Rom 13:1-2). We may not have much respect for the man of the office, but we must respect the office of the man.

Protest

The right to peacefully protest is enshrined in the Bill of Rights: “The right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” When the government commands what God condemns, *then* we are obligated to disobey. For example, when Pharaoh commanded that all the male Hebrew babies were to be put to death at the moment of birth, the midwives responded with civil disobedience, and God blessed them for it (Ex 2:15-21). When the King Darius made a law against praying to anyone but himself, Daniel responded with civil disobedience, and God blessed him by delivering him from the lions (Dan 6:1-23). When the Christians in Asia

Minor were commanded to burn a pinch of incense and swear: "Caesar is Lord," they refused, threw their incense to the ground in defiance and declared: Christ is Lord!" Jesus commended them for their civil disobedience (Rev 2:8-10; 2:13). Finally, the same Peter who wrote that we should submit to the government's authority and respect the king is the same Peter who boldly told the religious rulers of his day who ordered him to stop preaching Jesus: "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29).

Consequently, there is a time for peaceful protest and even civil disobedience. However, the latter should come only as a last resort, after all other solutions have been tried and all other avenues exhausted, especially in America, which was founded upon Judeo-Christian principles and biblical laws. However, if the government commands what God condemns, then we are obligated to disobey.

Pay taxes

Paul spoke of the government's responsibility to punish evildoers and instructed: "This is why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing" (Rom 13:6). Be honest. This one hurts, especially when tax time arrives. However, when Jesus was asked about paying taxes, He commanded that we are to give to Caesar what is Caesar's" (Matt 22:21), and He also led by example (Matt 17:24-27).

Admittedly, there is a lot of waste and questionable spending, especially by the current regime in Washington. Like the Titanic, we have hit an iceberg, we are taking on water, we are still afloat, so some people are still having fun throwing snowballs on the deck, but we are about to drown under a sea of debt and rising taxes unless drastic measures are taken, and the first one is to stop the spending and borrowing against our children's future. The Bible says: "Let no debt remain outstanding..." (Rom 13:8), but we are amassing debt at an unsustainable rate.

Now we know what you are thinking, you've complained but the politicians aren't listening, they don't care, and they are going to do it anyway. But the great thing about America is that if our elected leaders won't change their political and policy positions to line up with the constitution,

then we, the people, can change their geographical positions by voting them out of office and sending them home.

Participate

In America, we have a representative form of government, but we are a part of it. Again, this form of government is intended as a “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” Therefore, if we do not actively participate, then we are not fulfilling the totality of Jesus’ command to “render to Caesar” (Matt 22:21). God expects us to get involved. After all, if Christians retreat from this arena, then we have allowed Satan to prevail in the very place where Jesus commanded us to make an impact as salt and light.

There are many ways we can participate in our government, such as helping with a voter registration drive, commenting on legislation and public policy, speaking out on moral and social issues on social media, holding public office, volunteering for the election commission, etc. Perhaps the most basic form of participation is voting—selecting our government. Exodus 18:21 says: “But *select* capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials . . .”

Voting is a simple act with a significant impact. When we vote, we help determine who will lead our nation, make our laws, and protect our freedoms. Founding father Samuel Adams said: “Let each citizen remember at the moment he is offering his vote . . . that he is executing one of the most solemn trusts in human society for which he is accountable to God and his country.”¹¹ Here are three practical actions steps on voting:

Register to Vote

Telling citizens of a democracy to register to vote should go without saying, but one can’t vote unless he or she is registered. And there are still many eligible Americans who are not even registered to vote. Some might say: “What’s the difference, my one vote doesn’t really count.” Yes, it does!

11 Harry Alonzo Cushing, ed. *The Writings of Samuel Adams* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1907), 4:256 (originally in the *Boston Gazette* on April 16, 1781).

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There are numerous examples where a handful of votes or even one vote made the difference. First you need to register, and it is so easy to do. Step one: Register to Vote.

Register a Friend

Take your friend a Voter Registration Form and help them fill it out and send it in. Point your friends to our FRCAction.org website to start the process. There they can fill out their form online, print it, and mail it in or take it to their election commission office. Help organize a Voter Registration Drive at your church, your school, place of business, etc. – just be sure to get permission. Step Two: Register a Friend.

Vote Your Biblical Values

Make the commitment to vote in the upcoming primary and in the general election. Here is an old proverb that is still true today: “Bad politicians are elected by good people who don’t vote.” Indeed Prov 29:2 declares: “When the godly are in authority, the people rejoice. But when the wicked are in power, they groan.” And if we don’t vote, we have no right to groan. So, voter apathy is indefensible, especially among Christians, who have been commanded by Christ to penetrate and influence our culture as salt and light (Matt 5:13-16) and participate in government as engaged citizens (Matt 22:21). So, Christians must vote!

Voting is a vital part of our stewardship responsibility. Yet voting for voting’s sake is not enough. We need to take it one step further and *vote our biblical values*. Think about this: Every candidate has his or her own set of values and positions on important issues, issues to which the Bible has principles that have specific application for believers. It is critical that we discover where a candidate stands on the issues and how their values line up with biblical principles. Shouldn’t we vote for candidates who share our values? John Jay, our nation’s first Supreme Court chief justice and one of the three authors of the Federalist Papers explaining our U.S. Constitution, said: “Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation . . . to

select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”¹²

Unfortunately, many Christians don’t even consider biblical values when voting, often choosing candidates whose positions on moral issues are at odds with their own beliefs, convictions, and values, not to mention biblical principles. That’s tragic because remember the Lord Jesus expects us to influence and impact, to permeate and penetrate “the earth” and “the world” as the salt and light, which would necessarily include the democratic process. We need to become informed on the issues, study the party platform statements, know what the candidates stand for and how they vote on issues we care about, read what they say about the issues, check out their websites, find out who are their enemies and who are their friends, then weigh the candidates’ values against biblical values, and prayerfully consider voting for the ones who are the best match. The closer we get to election time, FRCAction.org will be a great place to start.

One caution: Don’t align yourself too closely with a political party or a politician. That is unwise because we need to be free to call all political parties and politicians to repentance when they step outside of biblical morality and principle. Founding father Benjamin Rush is quoted as saying: “I have been alternately called an Aristocrat and a Democrat. I am neither. I am a Christocrat.”¹³ As Dr. Richard Land often says: “Our loyalty needs to be first, last, and always with the Lord Jesus Christ.” So, look for statesmen to support, not mere politicians. Politicians think about the next election; statesmen think about the next generation. Strongly consider voting for candidates who most closely align with biblical principles, who believe like you do. Don’t just vote to be voting—vote your biblical values!

Imagine the impact Christians could have on the direction of our government, the character of its leadership, and the moral health of our nation if we simply applied our biblical worldview and biblical principles to every aspect of our lives—including our participation in government. Under God, we could literally see America transformed. May God make it so!

I first met Dr. Land in 1978 when I was a student at the Criswell Center for

12 Henry P. Johnston, ed., *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1890), 4:365.

13 David Ramsay, *An Eulogium upon Benjamin Rush, M.D.* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1813), 103.