

Please find the insert in your worship flier. It gives you an outline of today's message so you can follow along. On the back is a daily guide to help you in your study of the Bible. Each day you get a verse and a few questions. I hope you'll use it to help you get into the Word.

A few months ago, 125 Christian leaders gathered in New York to talk about some of the most controversial moral issues of our time. This group ... leaders like Chuck Colson and Ravi Zacharias ... debated these issues and then issued a statement of their beliefs ... called the Manhattan Declaration. They focused three key issues they believe are under assault in our country: the sanctity of human life, the nature of marriage, and religious liberty. The Manhattan Declaration ... their statement on these issues ... was released to the public at a meeting of the National Press Club in November.

In their introduction, they made a case for taking a stand on these issues particularly. For example, last year Catholic Charities in Massachusetts chose to stop placing children in adoptive homes (this had been one of their ministries) when it was mandated that they place children in same-sex households, in violation of their teachings. A Methodist church in New Jersey was stripped of its non-profit status when it declined to allow its facilities to be used for the blessing of homosexual unions. The Manhattan Declaration goes on to say that "in Canada and some European nations, Christian clergy have been *prosecuted* for preaching ... against the practice of homosexuality." New hate-crime laws in America make it possible for the same thing to happen here. The great concern is that ... in the interest of separation of Church and State ... the free practice of religion is under fire.

Whatever your personal stand on these issues, the real question here is this: how much influence should the State have on the Church, and vice versa? What right does the State have

to regulate the Church? And what right does the Church have to speak in the public square? What right do people have to practice personal beliefs without interference? And at what point do we ... the State and the Church ... need each other?

Just to be clear, when we use the word “State,” we’re talking about government. From our earliest days as a country, our government has been committed to respecting the free practice of personal faith. The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights states, *“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”* This statement protects five basic freedoms, the first of which is the free exercise of personal faith. It means that the State can not choose a particular brand of religion as the official religion of the State ... nor can it stop me from practicing my personal religious beliefs. We often refer to this idea as “separation of church and state” ... although that term is never used in the Constitution or even in the Bill of Rights. That idea came from a separate commentary written by Thomas Jefferson. So while separateness is the term often used, it isn’t really so much separateness our founders wanted to emphasize ... but protection of freedom for the individual.

That’s what the Bill of Rights is about. **What does the Bible say about the relationship between Church and State?** I think we get at an answer in the story of Samuel, the last priest to serve as the leader of the Israelites. Remember that God chose a people ... the Israelites ... to be molded and made an example of holiness for the rest of the world. These were the children of Abraham, sent into slavery in Egypt ... people who’d lived under the oppression of a pharaoh for hundreds of years. Then God called them out of slavery and called them his people ... and he gave them moral laws to govern their community and he taught them how to worship

him so that God would be rightly honored. Moses was their first leader, and Aaron was their priest ... and the two of them worked hand in hand to lead the people. Once they settled in the land God had given them, they were not ruled but *led* by a series of priests and judges ... some more righteous than others.

Samuel was the last of those priests. By the time Samuel became their leader, the people had lost their respect for the system and were looking at how the other cultures were doing it and came up with an idea. And Samuel 8:4-9 says that - ... *all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 5 They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."* (up to this point, God was their King, but now they were asking for a human king and a secular government) *6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. 8 As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. 9 Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."*

God wanted them to know that if they got a human king, they'd sacrifice other freedoms. He told them that a king would draft their sons into the army and that a king would misuse the military for his own purposes. He told them their taxes would go up and their property would be regulated. Samuel told all this to the people, but (1 Samuel 8:19-22) - *But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. 20 Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."* (that's interesting to me that the people wanted someone to go out and fight their battles for them ...

they wanted to give their personal responsibilities over to the government) *21 When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. 22 The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king."*

What we hear in this story is God's desire to protect the people's freedoms and the people's short-sighted desire to hand those freedoms over to a human government. You see, this wasn't a choice between religion and government. This was a choice to set government above God. So what does the Bible say about the separation of Church and State? Well ... basically ... if this story is any indication ... we learn at least that God's desire is to protect our human freedoms. The lesson in this story is about who we lean on for protection and guidance ... God, or the government?

So ... should the Church and State be separate?

Jesus was once asked this question by some religious leaders who were trying to trap him. So they asked (Matthew 22:17-21) - *Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?*" (remember ... this was not an innocent question but an attempt to trap him in his words) *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, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."* His point was not that people should separate civic life from religious life, but that as a follower of God, it is moral, right and responsible to participate in civic life ... to respect its laws and help shape them ... but we do so as followers of God. Jesus is saying we don't give to Caesar what belongs to God. The moral law belongs to God, not the state. Basic human freedoms belong to God, not the State.

Our country announced its existence with a document called the Declaration of Independence, which says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights ...” and it goes on to say that the role of government is to protect these God-given rights. That’s the whole point of our Bill of Rights ... not to protect the State from the Church or any other institution, but to protect the freedoms of the people from a powerful government.

How do we as followers of Jesus relate to the State?

I’ve listed three passages in your worship flier, but I want to focus on one of them. Jesus says, in Matthew 5:13-20 - *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ... 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others ...* Jesus is teaching us here that we as his followers are called to influence public life ... and that society should be influenced by us, and not the other way around. So as followers of Jesus, how do we relate to the State? In the same way that salt and light relate to things. Killing infection, flavoring life, exposing truth. This is a huge call on the life of every Christian ... that by our presence and participation, the world and our government should be less evil, more holy, more transparent. According to the Bible, my faith is not a personal or private thing. It is meant to be used to make a difference.

So that leads us to one more question: **How are we to engage in public life?** This is where the big misunderstanding hits. Because of the media and a whole lot of fear out there, we’ve been led to believe that we aren’t supposed to show our faith publicly. But that simply isn’t right.

Not according to the Bible, the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. I want to give you five ways you can engage in public life as a follower of Jesus. First ...

- Respect authority.

1 Peter 2:13-16 says - *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority,¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.¹⁵ For (listen to this) it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of the foolish.¹⁶ Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.*

This is about becoming the kind of active, law-abiding citizen that brings honor to God's name. It isn't about blindly following anyone in leadership. Its about working within the system as a follower of Jesus to bring integrity to it. Paul says, "It is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of the foolish." Seek positive ways to make a difference. Speak respectfully of those in leadership, and as you discuss the issues, pray for wisdom.

- Lead if you are called to lead.

Adam Hamilton says, "Our democracy rises and falls based on the willingness of thoughtful people of conscience to get involved with the political process ... (and) to say that people of faith should not interject their personal values into the political process is a practical absurdity." We elect people based on their ability to lead with integrity. And we desperately need leaders with a strong spiritual and moral grounding to shape their ideas and decisions.

- Vote intelligently (that means understanding the values of Christ).

Proverbs 29:2 says - *When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.* We need righteous people voting the values of scripture.

- Make an example of your life.

1 Peter 2:12 says - *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.* This means we have to make choices in how we engage the world. We should not be the ones screaming hate on talk-radio or defaulting to the State for morality or charity work. It is not the State's responsibility to do the work of the Church. That is our responsibility. It's our job to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly, and to affect the laws and culture by our example.

- Pray for your leaders, your community and your country.

It has been said that if you don't vote, you don't deserve to complain. I would add that if you are not praying, you don't deserve to complain. It is not only our right to affect the country through prayer ... it is our biblical responsibility. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says - *I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.* It is appropriate and healthy for churches to pray for God's will to be done when elections are held. We can't promote a particular candidate, but we can pray for God to work through the election process and for God to work through whoever is elected. We can pray for fair and just elections and for decisions that uphold the moral laws of God. This isn't imposing our religion on the State. This is the First Amendment at its best. It is our right and our responsibility to function as people of faith. When we give up our right to practicing our faith publicly ... well, then ... I would be gravely concerned that God might remove his hand from our country.

CINDY COMES ... I will ask folks to stand, then pray, then announce the service tonight.