

# CHRISTIANITY & LIBERTARIANISM

**ALLIES, NOT ENEMIES**

**CAN CHRISTIANS BE LIBERTARIANS?**

**CAN LIBERTARIANS BE CHRISTIANS?**

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# INTRODUCTION

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Christian libertarianism is becoming well-accepted among Christians as a definite alternative to the more pervasive conservative-liberal paradigms. Our goal in this booklet is to present some of the best Christian libertarian ideas in a clear, concise, and compelling manner. The Libertarian Christian Institute exists to demonstrate that libertarianism is the most consistent expression of Christian political thought, and we know that message shines through in these few pages. All of these essays can be found online as well at [www.libertarianchristians.com](http://www.libertarianchristians.com), we hope you will find us online, participate in our programs, and continue to share these great principles with your fellow Christian friends and family. Soli Deo Gloria!

# CAN A CHRISTIAN BE A LIBERTARIAN?

BY NORMAN HORN

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**Norman Horn wrote this article for the Washington Post in December 2011, and it became one of the most widely disseminated pieces of Christian libertarian literature in existence today.**

Christians in American politics have argued for years that God endorses the political agenda of Republicans or Democrats, but is there a third way to think about the relationship between God and government?

Christians from the left and the right are increasingly turning to libertarianism not because it is a “middle ground,” but because it is an entirely different way of thinking about government and power.

The core of libertarianism is the non-aggression principle: that the initiation of force against person and property is immoral, and it is in many respects a kind of political corollary to the Golden Rule. Thus, Christian libertarians think that government power should be limited, sound money and truly free markets should return, aggressive war must cease and civil liberties must be preserved. Despite objections raised by other Christians, many Christian libertarians have found a friend in Texas congressional representative, presidential candidate, and lifelong Christian Dr. Ron Paul, because he also believes in these important principles.

Libertarianism treats man’s sinful nature realistically. James Madison famously quipped that if men were angels no government would be necessary. Christian libertarians take this a step further, saying that it is precisely because men are not angels that government must have extraordinarily limited powers. God does not show favoritism nor does he give special privileges of position. Everyone is accountable to the moral law in the same way. When governments and politicians extend their power so that they can abridge people’s natural rights with impunity, they have crossed the line into immorality. Rep. Paul’s message is that the United States government has been far across this line for decades and the remedy is to follow the Constitution. The Founders created the boldest attempt in history to limit state power, yet presidents and congresses, both Republican and Democratic, have repeatedly refused to

adhere to their own rules. True, lasting change can only be found in reducing the power of the federal government.

Libertarians talk a lot about economics, and rightfully so. Money is central to a healthy economy. Christians are also concerned about money; in fact God talks frequently about money in the Bible. God's warning against unjust "weights and measures" in Leviticus 19 is a warning not to tamper with the market ecosystem of money and trade. Rep. Paul acknowledges the Bible's concern for honest money as well in *End the Fed*: "The Bible is clear that altering the quality of money is an immoral act... It is dishonesty in money that has been a major source of evil throughout history." If the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, as 1 Timothy 6:10 says, how much more seriously ought we to take how our society views the control over the supply of money? If it is true, as many libertarians contend, that the Federal Reserve is the primary cause of the economic crisis we have today, then the only solution is to restore honest, sound commodity money, free from political machinations and special interests.

It is truly unfortunate that modern American churches seem to think the state's means of "spreading democracy" through aggressive war is more important than spreading the peaceful message of the Gospel of Christ. Jesus came to bring "peace on earth, good will to men," and by extension the Christian's goal ought to be the same. Rep. Paul wrote in *Liberty Defined*: "It's a far stretch and a great distortion to use Christianity in any way to justify aggression and violence." War kills the innocent, destroys property, and bankrupts nations. Christian libertarians believe that a non-interventionist foreign policy of peace, commerce, and honest friendship is more consistent with how God expects us to interact with world neighbors.

Libertarians think that everyone should be free to do as they will provided they do not infringe upon the rights of others. Christians can recognize the importance of this principle by simply observing history, recognizing how often that other Christians have been prevented from practicing their religion as their conscience requires of them. If we do not afford others the freedom to live their lives as they choose, how can we expect to receive the same freedom to do as we choose? Rep. Paul explains that government does not make people good in *The Revolution*: "The law cannot make a wicked person virtuous... God's grace alone can accomplish such a thing." God created us to be free to carry

out the dictates of conscience. We cannot continue to demand state control to restrict people's personal activity and yet assume our liberty is safe.

Through libertarianism, many Christians have found a way to move past their previous beliefs about politics and embrace a more consistent, more biblical political philosophy. The message of abolishing government power is powerful on its own. In Ron Paul, many Christian libertarians see a leader who points to principles that conservatives and liberals have long forgotten: "A system of government without limit, if unchecked, will destroy production and impoverish the nation. The only answer is to better understand economics and monetary systems, as well as social and foreign policies, with the hope that they will change once it becomes clear that government policies are a threat to all of us." Libertarianism is not going away, and it surely will take an increasingly prominent place in the political discussion of Christians for years to come.

# NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY OF THE STATE

by Norman Horn

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**This paper was originally published on [LewRockwell.com](http://LewRockwell.com) in September 2007. In April 2008, it won the Best New Paper Award at the Christian Scholars Forum at the University of Texas at Austin. I examine the nature of the State in the Gospels, focusing on the Temptations of Christ and the famous "Render to Caesar" passage. The focus shifts to Romans 13 and to application.**

## Introduction

Church and state issues continue to be the source of many conflicts among Christians today, resulting in a massive confusion in what exactly a Biblical theology of the state and public policy entails. The confusion often prompts awkward answers to important questions regarding the relationship of Christians to government, such as "What kind of government should a Christian support?," "What public policy should be obeyed?," or "What does submission to government mean?" Most Christians attempt to justify their political philosophy Biblically with Romans 13 in some way, if they attempt at all. At first glance, this appears to be an acceptable solution – Paul seems to call for submission to government. But how do we reconcile this passage with the undeniable fact that individuals acting within the coercive machinations of states have been the greatest culprits of criminal action and violence in the history of mankind? In Germany during the 1930s and 40s, for instance, theologians used Romans 13 to encourage submission to the Nazi regime, especially since it was democratically elected. More recently, a member of the Zimbabwean parliament declared that the corrupt dictator-president Robert Mugabe was sent from God and "should not be challenged in next year's watershed polls." Obviously, these are inappropriate ways for Scripture to be used, but how much different are we who live in the United States, a nation that often claims to be Christian? Are we simply to comply with the government because the Bible says so, or is more at stake?

Clearly the church has a need for a better framework for evaluating the nature of the state and the consequences of public policy. I propose to begin this process with an analysis of some New Testament passages that seem to address the relationship of Christians to civil government, specifically what we find in the gospels and in Romans 13.

## The Gospels and the State

The initial step toward developing a Biblical theology of government must be to examine the teachings of Jesus. What did Jesus say and do that helps us to understand what our reactions to government must be? Often those who want to derive Biblical principles about government from the gospels turn to the famous “Render to Caesar” passages, an event recorded in each of the synoptic gospels (Matt. 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17, Luke 20:20-26). But is this the only gospel text worth discussing regarding civil government? In my opinion, it is not. One can also obtain some important information about the nature of the state through the temptations of Jesus and a brief comparison of the kingdom of man to the Kingdom of God.

We begin with an analysis of the “Render to Caesar” passages, first examining the text of Matthew 22:

*Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away. (Matthew 22:15-22, NRSV)*

In Matthew, the Pharisees send some of their disciples along with Herodians to Jesus in order to “trap him in his words” at the temple. The Gospel of Mark says that “they sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to Jesus,” they likely being the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders mentioned in Mark



11:27. Strangely, Luke identifies the questioners as “spies” from the priests, teachers, and elders. The identity of these interrogators is not trivial. Indeed, the Pharisees and Herodians had stark differences in philosophy. Herodians were pro-Roman rule, and they used the Romans’ power to obtain certain benefits. The Pharisees, in contrast, were more ambivalent towards the Romans; Pharisees would generally tolerate them as long as Jewish religious practices were left alone. However, the Pharisees and Herodians are brought together because of their shared opposition to Jesus.

In each gospel, the question is prefaced differently, but the phrasing of the question itself is always the same: “Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” The question is very clever. The Herodians would be for paying the tax, and if Jesus answers in the negative they have grounds to arrest him for rebelling against Caesar. On the other hand, the Pharisees would generally not like the tax (although they are forced to pay it), and an answer in the affirmative would likely result in a loss of popular support of Jesus. Furthermore, there is a subtle legal phrasing in the question by asking “is it lawful,” or in some translations “is it permitted.” In other words, the Pharisees are asking, “Is it consistent with Torah (Jewish Law) to pay the tax to Caesar or not?” All those present were aware of the law and of the words of Leviticus 25:23, “The land [of Israel] shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine.” The question is now more complicated because Torah may be at stake. Since Caesar is trying to take the land from God, is it not disobedience to pay the tax?

Jesus saw through the trickery, of course, and responds with a clever gambit of his own. When he asks the Pharisees to produce a coin, they unwittingly bring forth the very evidence that exposes their hypocrisy. Jesus asks them whose image and inscription is on the coin. They answer, probably reluctantly, “Caesar’s.” But they, and the surrounding people, realize their error, for the inscriptions on these coins would always read, “Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of the deified Augustus, chief priest.” The Pharisees, those leaders expected to uphold the law of God, have brought into the temple an item that effectively breaks the second commandment, to have no graven images, showing that in their hearts they break the first commandment as well. They, not Jesus, are the hypocrites. They are the ones who bought into the Roman’s pagan system. In commentator Thomas Long’s estimation, Jesus’ response means, “Everybody has to decide between Caesar and God. No man can serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). You seem to have made your decision, forged your convenient

compromise. But what about your obligation to God? Render to God what belongs to God. Choose this day whom you will serve" (251).

If this interpretation is correct, then there is effectively no guideline set forth here for resolving church and state issues. State practices are not legitimized here by any means. Rather, Jesus says that any neat schemes of division in life that we create must come down, and discourages nationalism or jingoism as a legitimate church practice. We may live under a state, but we belong wholly to the God who is above all states. We are always to render to God what is God's.

An interesting clue to the nature of the state emerges in the temptations of Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13), which few commentators develop. In Matthew, the third temptation of Christ is "the kingdoms of the world and their splendor," which Satan can give Jesus if he pays obeisance to Satan. Strangely, even though Satan is considered "the Prince [ruler] of this world" (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11), we do not often seriously consider what Satan's offer means. I think that Satan was quite sincere in his offer; Jesus did not brush it off as impossible. Jesus seems to understand that the kingdoms of this world do belong to Satan, and we should not think otherwise. Logically, this means that the kingdoms of the world are at enmity with God. In fact, Scripture witnesses to this directly and indirectly in multiple places. The Old Testament strongly indicates that the pagan religions, often encouraged by Satan through their sorcery and witchcraft, were intimately tied to a nation's political leadership. G.K. Chesterton agrees with this assessment and gives evidences from history in his book *The Everlasting Man*. Herod clearly perceives that the baby Christ-child is a threat to his power, and hence orders the killing of hundreds, if not thousands of infants in an attempt to stop this incursion (Matt. 2). Furthermore, the theme of Babylon as an evil state under the influence of Satan permeates the book of Revelation. In Revelation 18:4, for instance, God exhorts His church to "come out of her [Babylon], my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues."

Briefly discussing the differences between the kingdom of man and the Kingdom of God is illustrative in this discussion. One of the recurring themes in the gospels, especially Matthew, is that Jesus is a king bringing forth the Kingdom of God. But Jesus explicitly says that, "My kingdom is not from this world... my kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). The "rules of the kingdom" as explained in the Sermon on the Mount are unlike any sort of state

laws that have ever existed. Furthermore, it is not the job of the Christian to use physical force to bring about his kingdom, but rather to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). The kingdoms of man are founded upon power and violence, but the Kingdom of God is founded upon humility (Matt. 18:4), service (Matt. 20:26), and love (John 13:35). While we cannot help being tied to states in this world, we are reminded once again that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20).

In summary, Jesus’ direct teachings about civil government are virtually non-existent, but the gospels make some strong implications about the nature of the state that might surprise us. The state appears to have a strong connection to Satan and his kingdom, and is antithetical to the Kingdom of God, which shuns the use of power for personal gain.

## **Paul’s Teachings on the State**

While one is hard-pressed in the gospels to develop a thorough theology for how Christians should interact with the state, the epistles of Paul and Peter address these issues much further. Romans 13:1-7 is the clearest exposition regarding civil government, but other significant Scriptures include Titus 3:1-3, 1 Timothy 2:1-3, and 1 Peter 2:11-17. However, for brevity’s sake only Romans 13 will be examined in detail. The following analysis has benefitted greatly from the works of Dr. John Cobin, specifically his books *Bible and Government* and *Christian Theology of Public Policy*, which in this author’s opinion provide the best and most thorough attempt to integrate this passage into a consistent understanding of public policy theology.

Paul was a Roman citizen by birth, and even used his citizenship to his advantage on one occasion in Acts 22 and 23. Yet, he was a “Hebrew of Hebrews” and a Pharisee in regard to the law of God (Phil. 3:5). Hence, one would expect for him, like the Pharisees in the gospels, to be somewhat resentful towards the Romans because of their rule over the land of Israel. Yet in Romans 13, Paul seems to be quite positive towards Roman rule. A “face value” reading of the text might lead one to believe that the state is a very positive force in society and perhaps even a divinely ordained institution in the same way that the family and the church are divinely ordained.

However, I do not think this sort of interpretation is warranted. Apostolic admonitions regarding civil government cannot easily be reconciled with a

casual, plain reading of the New Testament texts. Otherwise, you would conclude that the apostles were either wrong, speaking within an irrelevant cultural context, or just out of their minds. When one considers the actual historical context of Romans 13, rather than lifting it out of Scripture as merely abstract ideas, a surprising reading emerges. To illustrate this, how would the interpretation change if one replaced the words “governing authorities,” “rulers,” and the personal pronouns with the names of the emperor and kings of that time, namely Nero, Herod, or Agrippa? The text would read as follows:

*Let every person be subject to Nero and Herod; for there is no authority except from God, and Nero and Herod have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists Nero and Herod resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.*

*For Nero and Herod are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of Nero and Herod? Then do what is good, and you will receive Nero and Herod's approval; for Nero and Herod are God's servants for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the Nero and Herod do not bear the sword in vain! Nero and Herod are the servants of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject to Nero and Herod, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for Nero and Herod are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to Nero and Herod what is due them – taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. (Romans 13:1-7, NRSV)*

How should Christians today interpret this knowing that Nero was in power at the time of Paul's writing? How can we resolve the problem of knowing that Nero killed good people, namely Christians, when the passage clearly says that civil government rewards and commends those who do good? Clearly, the interpretation problem is not resolved with an immutable maxim as simple as “do what the government says.” Both the Old and New Testaments manifest that this is not right or true on multiple occasions. Some examples include:

- Hebrews defying Pharaoh's decrees to murder their infants (Exodus 1)
- Rahab lying to the King of Jericho about the Hebrew spies (Joshua 2)
- Ehud deceiving the king's ministers and assassinating the king (Judges 3)

- Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to comply with the king's decrees, and were miraculously saved twice (Daniel 3 and 6)
- The Magi from the East disobeying Herod's direct orders (Matthew 2)
- Peter and John choosing to obey God rather than men (Acts 5)

The text of Romans 13 can be better understood with an appreciation for the historical context and evident reason through Scripture and experience, rather than taking a "face value" interpretation as so many Christians often do.

*<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.*

Verse 1 says that state authorities are instituted by God. Paul's primary message for Christians, however, is not that states are specially instituted in the same way as the family and church, but rather that the state is not operating outside of the plans of God. In this sense, the state is divinely instituted in the same way that Satan is divinely instituted. God is not surprised when states act the way they do. As noted specifically in the Gospels, the state is understood throughout Scripture as being intimately tied to Satan and his kingdom, and patently opposed to the Kingdom of God. The state's status within God's ultimate plan does not legitimize the evil the state commits.

Submission to civil government, then, is always qualified. The command is to obey in general, but sometimes we will disobey public policy because of personal and Scriptural conviction. Christians are to obey most policy whenever directly requested to do so, but ensuring active compliance with every public policy is unnecessary. All submission is directed at being expedient and practical toward men and glorifying toward God. Cobin explains that, "Any sin problem for disobedience arises only when one's action is unwise, involves poor stewardship, requires neglecting one's family duties, or detracts from the believer's principal purpose in life" (Christian Theology of Public Policy, 120).

*<sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; <sup>4</sup> for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.*

Verses 2-4 indicate that if you irritate the state then you will face wrath, but if you behave in the way the state wants then they will be pleased. At many points, what the state defines as good and evil may be very much opposed to what God defines as good and evil. But what Paul is telling the believers in Rome is that if they do something that the Roman government defines as evil then they will likely be punished for it. We cannot abstract this verse from its cultural context and make it an absolute requirement on all cultures at all times. To do so would be to put Christians under a great bondage to bad public policy. There is no compelling reason to think that Paul was deliberately writing about any particular rulers other than those in the first century Roman Empire.

Paul knew full well the power of Nero and the potential harm he could cause to Christians in Rome – he calls it “the sword” – and he does not want believers to be persecuted for anything other than the name of Christ and what he stands for. Paul reminds the Roman Christians, though, that even the dreadful power of the state is not outside the power of God. His message to them is the same as Romans 8:28, that “all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” The state can indeed be a means of sanctification for the Lord’s church.

*<sup>5</sup> Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. <sup>6</sup> For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, busy with this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Pay to all what is due them – taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.*

Verses 5-7 expand upon the reasons for submitting and include practical ways the Roman Christians were to respond to Paul’s message. Cobin says, “The reason we must submit to government is to avoid wrath or worrying about being harmed by the state authority. God does not want us to be entangled with the affairs of this world to the point where such involvement detracts from our primary mission” (Christian Theology of Public Policy, 125). The word “conscience” in verse 5 should be interpreted in a similar manner as 1 Corinthians 10 (regarding food sacrificed to idols). The believers were concerned that the Roman state would find a legal reason to persecute them. One cannot use this verse in an absolutist sense to say that Christians can never participate in removing any authority, such as in the American Revolution. Paul also encourages Christians to “overcome evil with good” as understood in

Romans 12:21 (this includes evil authority), and to work to be free if at all possible (1 Corinthians 7:20-23).

Paul also says to submit to paying taxes for the same reason: avoiding state wrath in order to live for God. One despises paying taxes, but in order to abate the state's wrath one pays them. Likewise, "pay to all what is due them" is commanded for the same purpose, especially considering the political tumult of the time. But does this mean that a man sins if he makes a mistake on his Federal tax return? Paul would very likely answer no. Modern taxes are very different from Roman taxes. In fact, the Greek word for "taxes" in verse 7 is more accurately rendered "tribute," which is specifically the capitation tax (or "head tax") in a Roman township census. The Romans would send soldiers from house to house, count the residents there, calculate the tax, and then demand full payment immediately. If a Christian did not comply at once, then he, his family, and possibly even his fellow believers could be in imminent, serious trouble. Paul says to not resist these men when they do this, just pay the tax. Refusal to pay would identify them as part of the tax rebels and political rogues of the day, and would give the Romans a reason to persecute Christians in Rome and perhaps throughout the empire. Paul wanted the Roman Christians to avoid becoming public spectacles and government targets.

As a general principle, modern Christians should do the same when immediate threat of state force is upon them, taxes or otherwise. However, modern taxes are not often like this; tributes and tariffs are not culturally transcendent forms of payments to states. Hence, one is most certainly not sinning if a mistake is made on a tax return. Cobin would even go so far to say that some taxes can be completely avoided without guilt (Christian Theology of Public Policy, 129).

Romans 13 is not an abstract, blanket statement that requires submission to all state laws, in all places, for all circumstances, at all times. Nor is it a prescription for what particular form of government is sanctioned by God or for how states should act. The historical context and wording requires us to be careful when making pronouncements about what a Christian's submission to the state looks like.

Christian obedience to government is for the purpose of expedient peaceful living and bringing no dishonor to the name of Christ. We are not obligated to follow every jot of public policy. Moreover, we are not supposed to

follow any law that goes against the law of God. If we are to be persecuted, it should be for the name of Christ and what he stands for, not for refusing to follow some random law when directly threatened by state action.

In conclusion, developing a theology of the state from the New Testament is understandably difficult. Examining the gospels, one finds that the state is not related to the Kingdom of God in any way, and in fact the state stands with Satan in direct opposition to God. The “Render to Caesar” encounter with Jesus does not legitimize the state and does not form the basis of a Christian’s interaction with government. Finally, a full understanding of Romans 13, taking into account its proper context, helps us to make better decisions within whatever state authority we find ourselves under.

## Endnote

1. Some scholars are not convinced that Romans 13 is actually referring to civil government. Mark Nanos argues that what Paul is talking about here is the obligation of Christians, particularly Christian gentiles who associated with the Jewish synagogues of Rome, to “subordinate themselves to the leaders of the synagogues and to the customary “rules of behavior” that had been developed in Diaspora synagogues for defining the appropriate behavior of “righteous gentiles” seeking association with Jews and their God.” (Nanos 291)

## For Further Reading

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# CONSERVATISM LAID BARE

by Laurence Vance

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*"Conservatism is the antidote to tyranny. It's the only one. It's based on thousands of years of human experience. There is nothing narrow about the conservative philosophy. It's a liberating philosophy. It is a magnificent philosophy. It is a philosophy for the ages, for all times."*

*"I realized that conservatism was the philosophy that best suited me, with its emphasis on individual liberty, personal responsibility, and merit."*

*"The Conservative does not despise government. He despises tyranny. This is precisely why the Conservative reveres the Constitution and insists on adherence to it."*

*"I follow the Constitution, that's what I do."*

— Mark Levin

Antidote to tyranny? A liberating and magnificent philosophy? Emphasis on individual liberty and personal responsibility? Reverence for the Constitution? Follow the Constitution? Conservative radio talk show host Mark Levin is deluded about both conservatism and the Constitution. And Sean Hannity calls him "the great one"? And he calls himself one of "America's preeminent conservative commentators and constitutional lawyers"?

Conservatism is none of these things. If you really want to see the true nature of conservatism, don't listen to anything said by Mark Levin. If you really want to see conservatism laid bare, then just take a look at the attitude of conservatives to the government's war on drugs.

A few years ago, Levin had "a Ron Paul supporter" on his radio show to talk about the war on drugs, which Levin supports. The "debate" is here if you can stand to listen to it. Once was even too much for me. I would almost rather listen to Sean Hannity, as horrible as that is.

If it were just Levin that was such an ardent drug warrior, then we could all just dismiss his show as the ravings of a mad man and ignore him. But it's not just Levin. His conservative mindset on the drug war is duplicated in the heads of the millions of conservatives who listen to Levin—and Bill O'Reilly, and Sean Hannity, and Rush Limbaugh. Levin's conservative mindset is common to most

if not all Republican members of Congress—and the more conservative they are the more they are in favor of the drug war. Levin's conservative mindset is shared by most if not all of the current crop of Republican presidential candidates—all of whom claim to be conservatives, and some of whom boast of how more conservative they are than the others. Candidates in previous years like Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney are no different.

I discussed the views on the drug war of some of the Republican presidential candidates earlier this year. Now we can also see what candidate Ben Carson thinks about the issue since he recently talked with Glenn Beck about it. Carson opposes the legalization of marijuana. He wants to intensify the drug war. He wants to spend more federal money and dedicate more law enforcement resources to enforcing drug laws and imprisoning offenders. He wants a police state to combat what he considers to be "hedonistic activity."

This is conservatism laid bare.

It is tyranny. There is nothing liberating or magnificent about it. It has no emphasis on individual liberty or personal responsibility. And rather than revering the Constitution, insisting on adherence to the Constitution, and following the Constitution, conservatism dishonors, ignores, and rejects the Constitution.

Nothing could be more tyrannical and unconstitutional than locking up men in cages to be raped, humiliated, abused, beaten, and suffer the loss of their job, their money, their family, and their dignity because they possess, consume, buy, sell, trade, manufacture, smoke, distribute, transport, cultivate, give away, or "traffic in" a substance the government doesn't approve of.

Women too, like Dana Bowerman. She was a first-time, nonviolent offender who was caged in a federal prison camp in Bryan, Texas, in 2001, at age 30, for taking part in "a conspiracy surrounding a methamphetamine ring." She was scheduled to be caged for 19 years and seven months, until 2018, but was one of about 6,000 federal inmates recently released early from prisons and halfway houses after the U.S. Sentencing Commission voted unanimously to retroactivity apply more lenient sentencing guidelines to drug offenders already behind bars.

It should be noted, however, that none of these prisoners were pardoned. They all still have a criminal record for the non-crime of a drug "offense." Thousands

more were not released. And Bowerman must keep close track of the rules: no alcohol and no traveling for a time beyond the rural area outside Lubbock, Texas, where she will be staying.

Every American in prison for a drug "offense" should, of course, be pardoned and released—immediately. No one should ever be questioned, detained, arrested, tried, fined, or imprisoned for a drug "offense." There shouldn't even be any such thing as a drug "offense," "crime," "offender," "trafficker," or "dealer." The whole concept should be considered just as absurd as a banana "offense," "crime," "offender," "trafficker," or "dealer."

And as I have pointed out so many times, there is nothing in the Constitution that grants to the federal government the authority to identify different types of drugs, regulate the sale and usage of drugs, classify drugs on a schedule, have a drug czar, set up a Drug Enforcement Administration, ban certain drugs, pass any laws related to drugs, wage war on drugs, or have anything whatsoever to do with any drug that is used for any purpose.

Conservatism is antithetical to individual liberty, private property, personal responsibility, and the Constitution. As is any statist, authoritarian philosophy that thinks people should be caged for engaging in peaceful behavior the government doesn't approve of.

**Originally posted at [LewRockwell.com](http://LewRockwell.com).**

# THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE

by Doug Stuart

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THIS IS A MODIFIED VERSION OF THE TALK I GAVE AT CHRISTIANS FOR LIBERTY 2015. THE PURPOSE OF THE TALK WAS TO EXPLORE WHY VALUING PEACE IS A CRITICAL POINT OF INTEGRATION FOR BEING A CHRISTIAN LIBERTARIAN. I WANTED TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, “WHO ARE WE, AS CHRISTIANS AND AS LIBERTARIANS.” IF YOU WERE PRESENT AT MY TALK, YOU’LL BENEFIT FROM READING CONTENT LEFT OUT DUE TO LIMITED TIME.

If you were to take inventory of what you see in the world around you, what do you think our world needs most? What grieves you when you watch or read the news? What makes your heart ache?

What is your reaction to hearing about yet another mass shooting or a devastating hurricane in a developing country? What is your reaction to the political responses to these tragedies? I’m deeply frustrated by what I see. I wish gun control advocates would avoid hasty actions and thoughtless proposals. I wish gun rights activists would humbly acknowledge that arming more people is not the easy solution to a deeper problem. I shudder when I read that climate change is causing hurricanes and therefore the poor are in danger if we don’t stop using fossil fuels instead of equipping them with the fossil fuel-based technology to protect them from climate danger.

When we get past our initial reactions and look deep inside to ask what we’re really looking for in this world, the answer is so profound it is often treated as cliché, and we don’t do cliché. So we look for another answer. In the movie *Miss Congeniality*, Sandra Bullock’s character, a no-BS undercover agent who needs to infiltrate the Miss United States pageant, is asked, like all the other candidates, what the most important thing our society needs. Every other candidate, who is caricatured as mindless, vain females wrapped up only in their appearance, says, “World peace!” After each of their answers, the crowd erupts with applause. The scene illustrates how far-fetched and idealistic the desire for world peace is. Bullock’s character, true to her authenticity, replies, “Harsher punishment for parole violators.” Crickets. It is not until she

reluctantly adds, "And world peace!" that the crowd erupts in applause for her. The scene illustrates that the answers provided by all but Bullock's character were of the same makeup as the characters themselves: plastic.

## **Libertarians Value Peace**

As trite as it may sound, seeking peace is not something libertarians are against. We are certainly for peace. Just consider Larry Reed's book title: *Anything Peaceful*. If it is not done in peace we are against it. We want to eliminate the use of coercion and force in our world, and we are highly critical of the state because force is its *modus operandi*. We believe that conflict can be resolved through conversation, cooperation, and collaboration, whether it be between individuals or institutions or nations.

This commitment to peace is most succinctly described as an outworking of the non-aggression principle. No aggression is permissible except in cases of self-defense. Offensive aggression is just that: offensive.

But for Christians, there's more meaning to peace.

## **Christians Value Peace**

Just like any word, "peace" may not adequately capture the biblical concept of peace. The Bible starts with the world being spoken into existence instead of appearing as a result of the warring gods of Babylon. The Israelites, both in slavery, in their own land, or in exile, were a people longing for shalom. And we see God actively working to get his people there, culminating in Incarnation – Jesus. That's why Jesus is so important. The heart of the Christian message is that God in Christ has come to bring peace to the world. Not just the absence of violence, but the presence of Shalom, a thoroughly Jewish theme.

Let's define shalom.

Cornelius Plantinga defines shalom as "...the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight...Shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be...the full flourishing of human life in all aspects, as God intended it to be."

So, think Eden. Original goodness as declared in the beginning.

What results from shalom? Hugh Whelchel from TIFWE believes real shalom will produce the following:

- Prosperity (Psalms 72:1-7)
- Health (Isaiah 57:19)
- Reconciliation (Genesis 26:29)
- Contentment (Genesis 15:15; Psalms 4:8)
- Good relationships between the nations and peoples (1 Chronicles 12:17-18). This means that peace has a social as well as a personal dimension.

The specific outcomes and results of such a world does not imply that everyone makes a particular wage, that income inequality is nonexistent, or that nobody ever owns a weapon of any kind (what would we do with rocks?). Perhaps in such a world there is a “living wage,” though how that comes about is probably through a combination of market forces and generosity instead of State-issued mandate. Perhaps in such a society health care will be affordable, but not because of a single-payer system for 100 million people but because basic needs are affordable through market efficiencies. Perhaps in such a world income inequality will be minimal or unproblematic, but because of genuine prosperity and thriving of all in society, not because of redistribution.

That last point, “good relationships between nations and peoples,” is important to focus on for a few moments. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul identifies Christians as “ministers of reconciliation.” What does that mean? What God did in Christ was reconcile the world to himself. Christians have inherited that ministry. I know most people think of this as a mission to convert individuals, but I think it goes further than that. The world needs the gospel because the world needs peace. I believe that Christians have a unique role to play in the world of politics if we are careful and deliberate.

If the gospel of Jesus were merely about personal spiritual awakening, Pilate and Caiaphas would not have colluded to crucify him. Yet Jesus was a threat to the Roman empire, and it was not because Jesus was a king like Caesar. It was because somehow what happened when people turned their allegiance to to King Jesus, it became a threat to the Roman empire. Identifying as Christian today poses little to no threat to the American Empire, but it should. Ron Paul, for instance, poses a serious threat with his prophetic admonitions to end the Federal Reserve System.

If allegiance to Jesus Christ does not in some way pose a threat to the empire, the gospel has been diluted to suit our consumeristic palates. Believing the gospel – being saved – is not a consumption good of eternal significance. It is a radical reorientation against empire and toward shalom.

## **Christian and Libertarian**

The commitment to peace is a minimum commitment to qualify as a libertarian. Libertarianism is by and large a philosophy about what one may not do to others and the logic that unfolds from that premise. However, deciding on what is prohibited, even if based on the non-aggression principle, does not go far enough for the Christian. If we are going to couple the term “Christian” and “libertarian” together, there’s something about the term “Christian” that modifies the kind of libertarians we are to be in the world.

Think about the second greatest commandment according to Jesus: Love your neighbor. Certainly not harming your neighbor by advocating freedom is included, but it does not capture the essence of love. Likewise, the essence of shalom is not captured by non-aggression alone. There is more to life than making sure people are simply nice to each other, though that’s enough of a task as it is!

When we confess “Jesus is Lord,” we are not simply affirming a religious dogma. We are declaring the counter-truth against the empires of this world, which say, “We rule you, bow to our demands.” We are declaring that Jesus is the rightful ruler of the world, and we can stand against the empire and say, “No, you’ve got it backward. You’re really not in charge, no matter how many weapons you wield.”

The empire is not inclined toward peace, but toward violence. Yes, modern empires have become particularly cunning in promising peace, but only at the expense of unwavering commitment to its agenda. And many Christians, Left and Right, succumb to its alluring aroma of power, endorsing it under the guise of the common good, establishing a “Christian nation,” or serving the kingdom of God. The result is the nearly cult-like fashion many Christians look for a leader that will set the tone for the nation. They look for perfect regulation that will stave off evil. They glorify or even worship the military instead of treating its rightful role as a protecting institution. They enthusiastically embrace so-called



rights bestowed by the state because they feel entitled to the property of others.

The Christian commitment to peace starts with allegiance to the Prince of Peace. Allegiance to Jesus Christ is a threat to empire. The message of liberty is a threat to empire. Christian libertarians are armed with both messages and are capable of speaking truth to power in a fresh way to a generation discontent with the current scope of allowable opinion. The world must be rescued from violent regimes.

How is the world rescued from violence? This is a big question, one that Christians have wrestled with for centuries. Part of the answer lies in reading our Bibles and finding our place in the ongoing narrative of history to see where God is taking us. That is, in order to get at the answer we need to understand the narrative of Scripture and a theological concept called *telos*.

## **Telos**

Jeffrey Tucker said at Students for Liberty in February, "If we knew what would result from freedom we wouldn't need freedom." This seems like an ambivalent way to treat outcomes, and it illustrates why Libertarians are not known for being people concerned with ends. "The ends don't justify the means," we often say. We talk about the legitimate use of force, which turns into discussions on the rightful place of state as an institution of force. I think Christian libertarians can offer something that is missing from this argument. That is, the means are the ends.

In a way, libertarians are concerned with the ends, just in a different way. Our "ends" are peaceful, non-aggressive, and free-from-violence processes from which emerge outcomes that indicate shalom. The "ends" are a way of being in the world.

So libertarians are about means and Christians believe the end is shalom. We believe this because we know there's a future toward which humanity is heading. We have insight into the divine *telos*. That's a Greek word, meaning "end, goal, completion, fulfillment." It reminds us of the Jewish belief that YHWH would someday come to earth and set the world right by establishing justice and shalom. That was the *telos* toward which the world was headed.

Brian Zahnd cleverly titles a chapter in his book, *Beauty Will Save the World*, "I Am From the Future." What he means is this: Jesus accomplished on the

cross and through the resurrection the seeds of Christian hope: resurrection and new creation. Theologians call this “inaugurated eschatology.” Jesus is not Lord-Elect, Jesus is Lord today. This is why Paul can say, “If anyone is in Christ, there is new creation!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Brian Zahnd eloquently states what was being declared:

*The world now has a new Lord. It is Jesus the Christ. The proof of this is that God raised him to life again after the principalities and powers of this age put him to death on a cross. All who believe this proclamation and confess Jesus as Lord are forgiven of their sins. Now, rethink your life and act accordingly.*

If we are from the future but we live in the present, then we must introduce shalom to a world which does not have the insight we have. They don’t see “new creation,” but we must show them.

In the end, heaven comes down to earth and God rules, and there is shalom. I believe that imagery applies today, so that where we see Jesus reigning and ruling today, heaven is on earth. In fact, that’s what Jesus taught us to pray: “on earth as in heaven.”

Let’s be clear, here: if God needed the state to carry on the kingdom, there would be little need for the Church. Yeah, I know some people say there’s a role for the state to do its part for the Kingdom of God. But considering Jesus rejected those options, I’ll take that as a repudiation of the violence and thus the state. Babylon had plenty of strength and could have been used to extend the knowledge of YHWH throughout its empire. God could have used the power and extensive reach of the Roman empire to send the message of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. But what we see is God becoming flesh at a time when empire was at its pinnacle, during a time when “son of God” was a title given to Caesar Augustus, during a time when declaring Jesus is Lord was a highly charged counter-claim to empire, namely, “Caesar is not!”

The end to which history is heading – heaven on earth – is one away from reliance upon empire and toward reliance upon God as king. And just how does God act as king? Let’s take a look at the first group who were the people of God, Israel.

What we see in the story of Israel is a people thoroughly immersed in a grander narrative that framed their identity. Their oral tradition, which we have

as literature today, were identity-forming stories. That's why generations long after the exodus, the Israelites were celebrating, or enacting, Passover, because that was their past, and it was deeply ingrained in their identity.

They were shaped by their past but oriented toward the future. And what was the future? The day when things would be put right – shalom!

Let's go through a brief tour of Israel's history.

## Identity

### *The Big Story*

Starting with Adam we see that humanity wants to be god-like rather than god-ly. Our propensity is to usurp God's true authority, whether through being "like god" by eating the fruit of knowledge, building a tower to heaven (Babel), or asking to have a king like other nations. Human beings often seek some other authority other than God.

When Israel asked for a human king, they were rejecting God's kingship over them. God relented, but we must remember that this was Plan B, not Plan A, where God ruled. 1 Samuel 8 is such a weighty passage that the astute reader might think that later in the Old Testament, God will probably say, "I told you so."

But even then, God adapts to the new reality, letting Israel be free to choose a human king, and the rest of the Old Testament is Israel's story centered on the story of David:

*"I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever." (1 Chronicles 17:14)*

*"Of all my sons—and the Lord has given me many—he has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel." (1 Chronicles 28:5)*

*"Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on his throne as king to rule for the Lord your God. Because of the love of your God for Israel and his desire to uphold them forever, he has made you king over them, to maintain justice and righteousness." (2 Chronicles 9:8)*

Remember, though, that a human king on the throne was God's Plan B. It wasn't God's first desire. So under human kingship, the end result was, as we

know, exile. In exile Israel must hope for God to someday rule again. When would that happen? Reading Amos 9:11, we read

*"In that day 'I will restore David's fallen shelter—  
I will repair its broken walls  
And restore its ruins—  
And will rebuild it as it used to be."*

The restoration of God's rule was then framed in terms of the Davidic kingship. We should not read this as though God reflects and says, "Well, I guess the king thing worked out after all." No, David left a legacy that hearkened back to a time when life was good for Israel (relatively speaking). So we see God telling Israel God will be restoring something again. There will be a new beginning. Their eschatology was awaiting a messiah that would be the new David.

So when we get to Acts 15, James verifies that exile is over because Jesus is the new beginning. God is once again on the throne and ruling the land. When Jesus is announcing the Kingdom of God is near, he is saying exile is over and God is now the rightful king.

Notice something about the phrase "Kingdom of God." "Of God" is important, because as much as we see God's newly restored people as a restoration of the Davidic Kingdom, it isn't so much a better Plan B, but a Revised Plan A. When we think of Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Heaven, it isn't so much about a location or place of operation as it is a space here and now being occupied for a new purpose. It is a contrast between the rule of humans, even one so nostalgically remembered as David's, and God's rule.

One way to think of what happened 2,000 years ago is that God had brought the future for the world into the present. And the Early Church embraced this future orientation rooted in the history of Israel. In a very real sense, when the Church acts as the Body of Christ in the world today, we make the future happen in the present. It was demonstrated by God's Son, and carried on through his Body – the Church – led by the Spirit. Insofar as God's rule and reign is manifest today, we are witnessing the future.

### *The Renewed People of God*

The incarnation of Jesus and his message of the Kingdom make it clear that the purposes of God will one day be fulfilled. How? It will be accomplished through the

Body of Christ, the Church — who N.T. Wright calls “the renewed people of God” — led by the Spirit into this new Kingdom reality. Our call and vocation as followers of Jesus is to build for this Kingdom.

So if the gospel stories were written to proclaim that God has become King, and Jesus’s main proclamation was, “The Kingdom of God is arriving in me,” then we have no reason to doubt the King’s power to advance his kingdom, in spite of all that stands in its way. Jesus’s way was peaceful, nonviolent, and self-sacrificial. This stands in stark contrast to the political kingdoms of this world (see Matthew 20:24-26).

So let me be clear here about our identity as Christians: the church is political through and through because its identity is counter-truth to the empire of lies. But let’s not be mistaken about what it means to “be political.” This doesn’t mean we ought to be more politically involved. What it means is that we are to embody what the reign of God looks like. Involvement in politics, if we choose to be involved, is a minor chord in God’s grand masterpiece. We don’t need the state. We need to embrace the message of Jesus and embody it in the world. In contrast to the state, we demonstrate clearly that human beings cooperating, sharing, or even living in community are capable of producing more goods and providing better services than the state ever could.

When we live as resident aliens in a world of empire, we have been given the creative task of speaking prophetically to that empire.

Christians live as “resident aliens” in a world dominated by empire. A central component of our mission to announce the gospel to all the world is serving as a prophetic voice as we speak truth to power. Libertarians know all-too well that the State is an empire which deserves our critique.

## Prophetic Voice

What do we do? Let me quote Brian Zahnd again (Beauty, p 150):

*In the midst of a hateful, violent, and idolatrous world, the church is to be an enclave of love, peace, and holiness. To be a faithful church, the church must be distinguished by holiness. Not holiness as puritanical moralism, but holiness as otherness — we are to be other to the values of this present darkness.*

In the world of politics in America, libertarians know all-too well what it means to be considered as “other.” As Christians, it is beginning to feel that

way as our society becomes more pluralistic. But being “other” is part of our identity, and it means being a light-bearer, a peacemaker, a truth-teller. What exactly does this look like?

We libertarians spend a lot of time trying to abolish the institutions and programs the state has decided are “good for us.” We spend a lot of time advocating for deregulation, privatization, and restricting the state in any way possible. That’s fine, and I have no quarrel with these endeavors. But since we are from the future, and because we know shalom has no room for empire, we can expect the state to become obsolete. Let’s plan on it!

We don’t see the Early Church moving to overthrow the Roman Empire, but neither do we see strong endorsement of it. (If you’re thinking of Romans 13, I’ll direct you to this article. And this one.)

Put yourselves in the place of Jesus’ followers, thoroughly Jewish for the most part, where religion and politics were woven together. Rome was occupying your land, and Jesus comes along, promises a new politic, but is then killed by the very empire you want to be rescued from. You’re disappointed, but then – resurrection! Everything changed. It was an exciting time. Can you wonder why they didn’t seem to be very concerned with what happened to the Roman Empire?

In other words, the early Christians simply went on living joyfully in this new reality, calling people out of empire, speaking truth to power, and serving as ministers of reconciliation. They were wholly unconcerned with the usefulness of the state. They didn’t need it.

An important aside: it’s remarkable that the early Christians were able to enjoy the freedom of living in Christ whether they were oppressed or free. Paul said he was content in all circumstances, free or in bondage. Whatever empire is oppressing us, we can and should live as free people.

Let’s end with how libertarian Christians can be a prophetic voice against empire.

### *Speak Truth to Power*

Libertarians have been keen on identifying the nature of the State, calling it out on both overt evils and innocuous inefficiencies. As Christians we are to awaken others to a reality which they are unable to see. This takes prayer, of

course, because only the Spirit of God can cause the blind to see. But they must have something to see.

Empires project a sense of all-embracing normality. Not only do empires want us to think that reality is totally composed of the structures, symbols and systems that have been imperially constructed, they also want us to believe that the future holds no more than a heightened realization of imperial hopes and dreams . . . If all the maps are provided by the empire, if all the reality we can see is what the empire has constructed as reality for us, then our praxis will never be creative, and it will never be subversive to that empire. (Walsh and Keesmaat, 155-156)

A prophetic imagination is required for us to take this task seriously.

Reliance upon the state must decrease, and reliance upon peaceful means of social progress must increase. Libertarian Christians are poised to offer a beautiful alternative to the limited options from which the church and the world are used to selecting.

- We believe a free society is the best framework for diffused power so that people are genuinely free.
- We believe that stable property rights are the best framework within which free humans can cooperate and resolve conflict.
- We embrace the intrinsic value and worth of every human being.
- We believe in peace and are against all forms of initiation of aggression.
- We pray for and actively work toward a world where the will of God is done "on earth as in heaven."

I often engage with progressives who tend to focus on the societal issues they deem problematic. I do my best to focus on areas of agreement and propose changes I believe would result in their preferred outcomes. For instance, ending the banking cartel we know as the Federal Reserve System would eliminate many of their worries about wealth disparity. Probably not all, but it's a good start, and most progressives are at least willing to entertain this option. Another area of common ground is imperialism: bring our troops home, no more wars, and dramatically reduce military spending. A third is mass incarceration. I'm not well-educated regarding non-violent offenders, but it seems to be a bipartisan effort to at least evaluate this. To be quite honest, I'd die a happier man if we only made those three changes, and none others. Well, okay, I'd add a fourth: I'd like to see something relatively close to open borders.

We as libertarians believe in the autonomy of the individual, but as Christians we believe in the necessity of community. We enjoy the fruits of fellowship and the camaraderie that comes from a sense of belonging. We do not have to pick between individualism and collectivism.

“Communities which are genuinely voluntary can affirm individual dignity... without enshrining individualism. They can likewise realize community without authorizing lordship or establishment” (John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*).

This life is founded upon a message of peace and carried out through the practice of love toward our neighbors. When individuals choose peace over conflict, they embody God's Kingdom. When individuals die to self in efforts to reconcile differences, they embody true Kingdom power. This doesn't mean bringing together only those who are fighting. Embodying real community means bringing that which is broken into wholeness, and this can be done in various ways, both in the local church and in the marketplace. Providing a job, if you're a business owner. Turning natural resources into usable energy, technology, or sustenance is a powerful way to move toward prosperity for more people and is far more creative than confiscating already-existing wealth from the people who have done such work.

What works against reconciliation?

In an earlier post, I gave two examples of two popular opinions. Here they are, evaluated in light of reconciliation.

- “We should tax the wealthy.”
- How does this incline our heart toward love?
- Does this attitude reflect our love for people or our lust for what they have that we wish to use?
- If we accept this as a legitimate role for government, do we diminish our ability to see the rich as individuals made in God's image?
- Christian libertarians suggest that, in fact, taxation undermines human dignity and reflects a lack of respect for those taxed and even for those receiving the state benefit.
- “We should secure the borders.”
- However we define “secure,” this statement is fraught with disheartening attitudes toward other human beings.
- What is it about those living on the other side of a geopolitical border that makes them a threat?
- Perhaps those most adamant should stand at the border and face a hungry child and say to her, “If I say yes to you, I will have to say yes



to potential terrorists.” Is that too subjective an idea on which to base policy? Perhaps. However, if we are committed to reconciliation, a certain element of subjectivity is involved in all decisions, try as we might to be as objective as possible.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

The gospel is the announcement that God’s new movement to rescue creation has begun in Jesus. Christ on the cross and God’s raising him to life is the final defeat of the violent Roman empire, and by implication all empires and their violence. New creation means empire is ending. When Christians declare that Jesus frees us from sin, that means Jesus frees us from the consequences of our own sin as well as the consequences of the damaging effects of sin.

Lastly, let me issue a word of caution, because we can easily become sloppy in our thinking regarding works like “freedom” or “liberty,” equivocating on their usage in Scripture. We can also become over-zealous in defending ourselves using the Bible. Libertarians should use wisdom in using the Bible to defend freedom. Freedom from empire is certainly part of the good news of the gospel, but it is not the whole gospel. Liberation theology, for all its contributions to the theological conversation, seems to miss this point. Liberation from empire is part of the gospel because Jesus came to liberate us from sin and the manifestations of sin. The satan was defeated, and hence the satan’s greatest achievement in institutionalizing violence (the state) is defeated.

To not be misunderstood, let me be clear: advocating for liberty is not the whole endeavor of working for God’s peace on earth. Libertarian peace is not identical to shalom.

The peace found in a free society is a healthy starting point and can serve as stage one in recognizing the things that make for peace by discerning that which works against it. That’s our aim as libertarians. As Christians, we take it one step further. We embody the reign of God in the world as a counter-script to the narrative empire gives us. We love from the bottom up and not the top down.

Embracing a dual identity – libertarian and Christian – means to go beyond fighting against things worth fighting against, and begin striving for that which is worth striving for.