



Did God Really Say?

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Jeremiah 29:11

JANUARY 2025

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 29:11 • ESV

This month we're going to start a series here in the newsletter, a series I'd like to call "Did God Really Say?" It's a series devoted to quotations of the Bible ripped from their context and taken in a completely different direction than what their actual meaning is. If you have a verse you'd like explained in this way, please let me know. So to start this series off, we're going to start in the book of Jeremiah, with Jeremiah 29:11.

How is this quote misused? The way that it is most commonly taken and twisted is that God will not let His people suffer. But what happens then when a believer encounters suffering? What happens when that misguided believer reads the book of Job? What happens when that believer makes a foolish decision, and as a result of that, they suffer? All of a sudden, their inner voice starts in with the same things that Job's friends turned to: "You must have committed some sin that caused you to fall away from the faith, because God wouldn't afflict a true believer." After all, God said that He had plans for good, and not for evil. Yet Jesus also says to His disciples, *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

And a cursory reading of these verses will lead you to a seeming contradiction, but we confess that Scripture does not contradict Scripture. Our Lord does not and has not lied to us, but He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). So, how can God have plans for our welfare and not for evil, yet warn us that in this world we will have suffering? How can these two things be true at the same time? The answer is simple, but difficult to hear and even harder to understand. However, I think a greater understanding of the context of Jeremiah 29 will help us understand.

Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive—to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. (Jeremiah 29:1) This context tells us who these words were intended for. These words were written to the captives of Judah who were taken away to Babylon. Among these captives were the faithful remnant of God's people. God had planned the exile to be for 70 years, and during this exile His people were going

to live in Babylon, not as they did in Egypt as slaves and outcasts, but to live as citizens of the Babylonian, and later Persian, empire. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah all rose to positions of power under King Nebuchadnezzar. Esther would become a queen of the Persian emperor. So God did very much have a plan for His people, a plan that would see them exiled for 70 years, after which they would return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. They would rediscover the scrolls of God's promises. There would continue to be faithful men and women who would pass on their faith, until these plans were realized in the birth of Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all of God's plans. He is the only hope, the only path to a future that lasts forever.

But, like those exiles that Jeremiah was writing to, we are living in anticipation of this hope being fulfilled. Which means that there will be suffering here and now. Suffering that God will use for our good. Suffering that will strengthen our faith, that will open our hearts to the sufferings of others. *Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion According to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, Nor grieve the children of men.* (Lamentations 3:32-33) So, there will be suffering in this world, but it is not going to last forever. For Jesus Christ has died on the cross and freed us from eternal suffering. Amen.

Matthew 7:1

FEBRUARY 2025

Judge not, that you be not judged.

Matthew 7:1 • NKJV

For our second installment of "Did God Really Say?" we'll be looking at the verse that inspired this series, Matthew 7:1. Let's start by looking at how the world interprets these words of Jesus.

The most frequent way that this verse is used by those who don't know the Scriptures is as a shield to hide behind. They will be confronted by the reality that they are a sinner, and that a particular behavior that they like to engage in is, in fact, sinful. Rather than hear the Word of God, be cut to the heart, and seek repentance, the sinful human nature will attempt to justify, to rationalize, or in any way excuse the sinful conscience. This verse, interpreted incorrectly, does just that. It seems to silence any attempt to call the sinner to repentance, because the person who is issuing that call, how can they possibly know everything that is going on in my life? Are they God? Do



they know everything that ever is or ever was or ever will be? Doesn't Jesus tell them that He alone is the judge? So why are lowly humans trying to judge my sinful behavior, especially if that sinful behavior isn't hurting anyone? Isn't that just between me and God then?

And many of those arguments sound convincing if all you have to work with are these few words of Jesus in this one verse. But these words are not alone. Jesus speaks these words as part of His longer teaching which we call the Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon, Jesus addresses many problems with the ungodly behaviors and attitudes of the day. So what is He addressing in this section, that God alone is the judge of mankind? No. Jesus is expounding on this proverb, *"Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight."* (Proverbs 11:1) It's a problem that's an old one, the "rules for thee but not for me." Jesus makes it abundantly clear when you read the next verse: *For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.* (Matthew 7:2) Whatever standard you use for judgment, you have to apply it to yourself as well as to those whom you judge. Jesus isn't saying that you shouldn't judge. No, in fact, we are called to judge.

I know many of you probably just thought I lost my mind when I wrote that last sentence. Hear what our God says in Deuteronomy 30:19: *I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.* How can you choose something without judging it worthy of being chosen? Judging it to be the correct answer. You can't. In every choice you make, you are making a judgment. The color of socks that you wore today? That was your judgment call. You passed judgment between the plain socks and the socks that you got as a Christmas gift with colorful kittens on them.

"But that was the Old Testament, so that doesn't apply anymore." Except that God hasn't changed His mind. St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3: *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? So yes, brothers and sisters, we are to judge. But we are to judge with the judgment of God's Word. It is the standard that we can't fulfill but that has been fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ. So when we are judged, we will say, "Yes, I am guilty; I deserve nothing but death and punishment. But Jesus died and took that punishment for me." But those who deny our Lord will not have that defense. And it is for this reason that we judge our brothers and sisters, so that their hardened hearts might be broken, and they might receive a heart of flesh*

(Ezekiel 36:26). Lord Jesus Christ, give us Your Spirit, that we might keep Your Word in our hearts and minds to know Your just judgments. Amen.

Philippians 4:13

MARCH 2025

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13 • NKJV

In this month's installment of "Did God Really Say?" we'll be looking at every Christian athlete's default favorite verse from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, and find out if it really means what everyone thinks it means.

So, let's start with what everyone thinks that it means. Often, you hear this as an encouragement to take on a particularly difficult task, or one that has a low chance of success. As I mentioned earlier, many Christian athletes love to reference this verse, as if somehow their faith will give them superpowers that their opponents don't have. They might even start to believe that God has ordained for them to triumph over their enemies, because surely they can do all things, like win the sportsball game, through Christ. Now, while Christian athletes do have a superpower that their unbelieving teammates or opponents don't, it's not some sort of divine "I win" button. No, instead the superpower of the Christian athlete is that he expects to suffer in this world, and so is no stranger when things don't go the way that he or she hoped, anticipated, or expected.

And suffering is ultimately what this verse is all about. This isn't a verse about going out and conquering; this is a verse about enduring the attacks as the end draws near. Let's go back and grab some of the verses previous to this to establish the context that I'm talking about. We'll start with Philippians 1:12-14: *But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.* Paul is in chains, and guarded by the palace guard. In other words, he is imprisoned. Now while this is most likely his first imprisonment in Rome, from which he will be freed, he is still writing this while under house arrest. And approximately 8 years later, Paul will again be locked up in Rome, and this time it will end with his martyrdom and death.

Paul will say later in Philippians 4:10-12: *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.* Here we see clearly the context, for the very next verse is our verse for study today, that Paul can do all things through Christ. In other words, it's less about what Paul does and more about what Paul is able to endure. The Greek of this verse also makes it clear. There is no verb about doing; rather the verb is about being strong enough. And Paul is strong enough not on his own, but because Jesus strengthened him to be able to endure the suffering.

And make no mistake, brothers and sisters. The Christian life is a life that will be one of suffering. Jesus doesn't say to take up your daisy basket and follow Him. No, He says, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."* (Matthew 16:24) Paul himself in another letter talks about some of the suffering that he endured during his ministry. *From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.* But all of this Paul was able to endure because of the strength that Jesus gave to him. And that is what gives this verse the true power. Because not all of us became star athletes or rock stars or famous actors, even though Christ gave us strength in our lives. However, all of us have encountered suffering, and we haven't encountered it alone. Through it all Jesus has been there, strengthening us for the journey that we wouldn't be able to make on our own. So, to those of you who love this verse, I encourage you to love it for the proper reasons. Love it not for the glory that you might accomplish, but love it because of your Savior who will sustain you through the times of trial and difficulty. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Proverbs 22:6

APRIL 2025

Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.



Proverbs 22:6

This month in our series, "Did God Really Say?" we're going to be tackling a difficult verse that is intensely personal for many of us. This verse is the one listed above, Proverbs 22:6. So, how does this verse get misused? Well, it's often thought that as long as we get our kids involved in Sunday school, then when they get confirmed, and then later graduate and move out, that they will stay strong in their faith, because we made sure that they attended church and Sunday school, at least occasionally. And definitely on those really important days, Christmas and Easter. But let's just look at the grim reality that's staring us back in the face. Our confirmands take the oaths of confirmation, swearing that they will suffer anything, even death, rather than fall away from the faith, and then the very next weekend, stop coming to church and fall away from the faith. So either God's lying in the Proverbs, or we're doing something wrong.

Well, God's not lying, so what are we doing wrong? Well, it's time to take a good, hard, honest look at ourselves. Are we truly bringing up a child in the way that he should go? Or are we just bringing him up in the way he should go when it's convenient for us? What do I mean by that? Well, let's just look at a few numbers for comparison. Typically, there are 180 days in a normal school year; multiply that by seven and you get 1,260 hours a year spent in school. Then you have extracurricular activities; conservative estimates put this at 5 hours per week, adding 180 hours, giving us 1,440. Now let's assume that you only spend an average of 1 hour a night on homework, and that brings us up to 1,620. This is the average time per year invested in an "average" child's education. Don't get me wrong, education is important; it has a long-lasting impact on their entire lives. But what about something that will impact not just their entire lives, but their eternal lives? Let's say that they are confirmation-age children. You have 30 hours in confirmation instruction. Then you have 70 church services throughout the year, and let's say that they are 1.5 hours long. We're up to 135. Then you have 50 Sunday school sessions, and we're at 185. 185 hours vs. 1,620.

We are training them up in the way that they go, and that is the way that says God isn't nearly as important. We aren't taking the time to show our kids, by our actions, that God is important to us. We regularly miss church for foolish reasons and don't bat an eye, yet you wouldn't accept those same reasons for a kid to miss school, would you? We are training our kids up, just not how we think that we are. It's not enough for us to just drop them off at Sunday school and confirmation and just hope that God's Word takes root. We have to actively be involved in passing on our faith to our children. It's in the little chats throughout the day; it's in the conversations at the family dinner table; it's in the insistence that we get our stuff together and get to church, no matter that we'd rather be in our pajamas and taking it easy; it's showing our kids that we

read our Bibles too, that we're still learning from them and will be learning from them until the day that we die.

Yet, even when parents do everything correctly, sometimes their children still fall away. The author of this parable is Solomon, who wrote this for his son Rehoboam. Yet Rehoboam didn't listen to his father; he abandoned his wisdom the second that the crown was upon his head. Which means that sometimes, children will abandon the faith. And Jesus warns us about that in Luke 12:51-53: *"Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."* But, to that parent who is hurting, take heart. See what the proverb says. "In his old age." There is still hope. Luke will go on to record Jesus' parable of the prodigal son just a few chapters later in chapter 15. Repentance does happen. So continue to pray for your children, continue to drop the seeds of God's Word into their rocky and thorny soil. And trust in our Lord, for He will sustain you in His way, until He comes again. In Jesus' name, Amen.

1 Timothy 6:10

MAY 2025

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

1 Timothy 6:10 • NKJV

This month in "Did God Really Say?" we're looking at the end of Paul's first letter to Timothy. Now, if you didn't read it, and just glanced over it, I want you to go back up to that verse and read it carefully. You'll notice that it doesn't say what your mind thinks that it says, or at least what you've been told that it says. So why is this verse misquoted constantly? How does that misquotation change what this verse means? And what does this verse say about our lives here and now? Well, these are the topics that we're going to discuss today, so let's get started.

The way that we're used to hearing this verse is: "Money is the root of all evil." And don't get me wrong, unchecked greed is certainly horrible and sinful. In Paul's second letter to Timothy he will say, *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud,*



blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (2 Timothy 3:1-5) In that list are lovers of money, among all the other ways that sinful humans will behave before Jesus comes back again. But is the root of all that evil really money? Or is it something deeper? We should know that the root of all evil is nothing less than sin, as Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:19: *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.* That is, the heart of sinful human man. Money isn't in the heart, but sin is.

But why would that verse be misquoted? Is it simply an error that doesn't really change much about it? Sadly, it does change a great deal about it. For if money is simply the root of all evil, then wouldn't it be a much better world if we simply did away with all money? If we don't have money, then we destroy evil at its root, right? And so if we live in a world with no money, what world does that sound like? Yes, this is a deliberate twisting of the Scriptures by those who would advocate for communism and socialism. While many of the fathers of these movements hated Christianity and the Bible, they don't mind twisting it if it fits their own purpose. And Jesus had something to say about this. John 8:44: *You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.*

But what does this verse then truly say? That for many, the love of money has become their god, and the idol which they worship is their bank account, or their stock portfolio, or their retirement account, or their real estate investments or whatever have you. They have worked their fingers to the bone, put in long hours in the office; they have sacrificed and poured their blood, sweat, and tears into this. And it is in this that they trust, it is this that they fear, and they will tolerate no blasphemy of this their god. Their prophets are the stock market ticker and Dave Ramsey. Yes, it is but one form of idolatry, but it deadens the heart to so much more. People are no longer those who have been created in the image of God; they are just another number on a spreadsheet. And giving to the church, where's the return on investment in that? Can I buy forgiveness or salvation? What sort of a check do I have to write so that I don't have to come to church on a Sunday morning? These are the sorts of evil that the love of money can create in the hearts of sinful man.

But Jesus doesn't say that money is evil. He praises the widow who donates her mites. He tells the disciples to go fishing and they find the coin for the temple tax inside the

fish. He tells the Pharisees and scribes to give to Caesar what is Caesar's. He tells the parable of the lost coin, of the pearl of great price, of the debt of 1,000 talents of gold. Money itself is not evil. It's simply a tool that many can make an idol of. But Jesus Christ has come and paid for our redemption not with corruptible things like gold or silver, but with the precious holy blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). So, use money as the tool it is; be good stewards of it, but don't cling to it for comfort. Because you're just clinging to pavement in the end. *And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.* (Revelation 21:21b) In Jesus' name, Amen.

1 Corinthians 10:13

JUNE 2025

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 10:13 • NKJV

This month in "Did God Really Say?" we're looking at a passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Before we really dig into this today, I'd like you to go back up to the top and read that verse again. Don't just skim over it, but actually read it. Why am I telling you to do this? Because we have a similar problem this month as we did last month. There is a common misquotation of this verse that not only strips the context, but distorts what this verse is talking about. So we're going to break down the difference between what God has written and how Satan has twisted it, and by examining the greater context, see the real way that this applies to our lives today.

What you're probably more used to seeing is this twisting or something very similar, "God won't give you more than you can handle." Usually it's said to someone who is dealing with a very difficult area in life: perhaps a cancer diagnosis, or a major injury, or even the death of a loved one. And the person saying it often means well; what they are trying to say underneath it is that you are stronger than you think that you are. But it's not what the Scriptures say. The reality is that God DOES give us more than we can handle. That's the point. There is no way for us to handle the reality of sin and this fallen world on our own. It doesn't matter how many times we "pick ourselves up by our bootstraps," we're going to get knocked down again and we don't have the power to overcome this on our own. It's only through the intervention of Jesus Christ that He overcomes in our place. That's the whole point of Christianity. We can't do this on our own; we need salvation that comes from Jesus' death for us on the cross.



So how did Satan get there? In other words, what is Paul talking about in 1 Corinthians 10:13? Well, let's start by zooming out and taking in the context of this verse. Paul finishes defending his credentials as an apostle in chapter 9, ending on the theme of how he disciplines his body so that he does not lose the faith. He then opens chapter 10 with a warning to the Corinthian congregation to flee idolatry. In this discussion, he talks about how the people of God during the exodus fell prey to Satan and his temptation to idolatry. These were people who saw the pillar of cloud and fire, who literally ate bread that God provided to them, who drank water that God provided for them. There was no way to convince yourself that you were responsible for this bread appearing on the ground, or the rock that followed and provided the water. Yet they fell into temptation; they grumbled at God's gracious provision. Paul tells us that this is written in the Scriptures so that we might learn from their mistakes. So that we might learn that we can't stand on our own, that without God to support us we will fail utterly. Then he tells us that we aren't tempted any more than everyone else around us, that we don't have an extra special temptation because we're God's people. Satan hates all humanity equally, and tempts all in like measure.

So Paul says that we will be tempted, but that God will give us an out, and he makes it clear what that out is in the next verse, *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.* (1 Corinthians 10:14) Flee from idolatry to the only true God. Lean not on your own understanding, but trust in Jesus Christ and His salvation. And to do this, we need to be able to identify the idols in our lives. What are our false gods? It's simple: what do you fear, love, and trust above all things? Those are the things that are your idols. It's different for everyone. For some it's money. For others it's pleasure. For others it's family. Flee the idol, and go to the rock, go to the cross, and there you will find peace, security, and rest.

And there's a little more to this situation that we don't remember. We think of worship as a private matter, that religion is between you and your god. But that wasn't the case in Corinth or any part of the world that Paul would write to at the time of his writing. It was literally an act of treason to be an atheist in Rome, because you weren't doing your civic duty by praying to the local gods. But not every city enforced this penalty; many places were quite lax. And so Paul is telling people that it's okay to flee from a place that is going to force you into idolatry. We take this freedom of movement that we have in the modern world for granted. The Israelites were not free to leave Egypt; God had to come and bring them out.

Christians were relatively free to move around in the Roman Empire, so they could flee from somewhere that was forcing them into idolatry. But we've got an opposite problem today: we flee to idolatry. What do I mean by that? For those of you who

went to college or who are looking to go to college, did you even check that there was a faithful congregation anywhere nearby? Or did you just assume that you'll find a church there eventually? Shouldn't that be the first priority in our lives? So why does this always end up as one of the last thoughts on such an important and formative time in our lives? Or what about this: how many of you have had to relocate for work? When you were doing the calculations on whether or not to accept that position that would require relocation, where did a faithful congregation land on your list of important things to have? Did it even make the list? We don't flee from idolatry; instead, we often flee to idolatry. Now, I will admit, 2020 opened many eyes to this reality for the first time, and many of us have our eyes wide open on this matter now, and for that I thank God.

So, God does regularly give us more than we can handle, but that's a good thing. It prevents us from thinking that we don't need Him, that He's somehow just divine fire insurance, that we just have to pay our Sunday morning premiums and that will be enough to keep us out of the fires of Hell. Instead, we're confronted with the fact that we can't make it without Him, and that He is loving and gracious enough to be there with us, and to help us through it all. And we will be tempted, sorely tempted by Satan in this world. But you don't have to endure this temptation alone. You don't have to be a lone wolf, fighting against Satan and the world. Instead, you are what Jesus has said you are, His sheep. So flee to the protection of the Good Shepherd, the very one who laid down His life for the sheep, and He will protect you and keep you safe in the one true faith. Let us rejoice that Jesus does give us more than we can handle, because Jesus won't let us handle it alone. In Jesus' name, Amen.

2 Chronicles 7:14

JULY 2025

[The LORD says] If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14

Today, we have to deal with a stereotype that I pray not many of you suffer from, but many people who dabble in theology on social media definitely have. It's the belief that whatever they read in the Bible is directly about them. You'll see this in things like Ezekiel bread or the Daniel diet, where they will take things that happened to God's people out of context and try to make prophecies or promises out of them. One of

those things that is very frequent is that somehow God's chosen nation somehow becomes the United States of America. And then the promises that were given to that nation are then applied to the USA. But that's not the case. So today we're going to look at this particular promise that God made to His people, and see what exactly this promise was about, and how we should view this promise in our lives today.

So we need to start with the context. This verse is indeed the Lord speaking to His people, but when? Why? For what purpose? Well, Solomon has just completed the building of the Lord's temple in Jerusalem, and earlier in chapter 7 the temple is consecrated with the blood of the sacrifices. Later that night, the Lord appears to Solomon, and warns him of the dangers that will happen to the land, to the people, and to Solomon's house specifically if they abandon the worship of the Lord. Right before our text for today, God warns about times of drought, famine, pestilence, and locust swarms. Then He speaks the words of our verse for today. And while this isn't something that Solomon directly has to deal with, we see it come to pass in the days of Elijah and the other prophets. The people of God go astray, God sends famine or pestilence or drought, a prophet rises to call the people to repentance, and God turns away His wrath and restores the land.

God spoke these words as a warning to Solomon, telling him what to do when such a thing would occur. If that is the case, do these words still apply to Christians today? Jesus says in Matthew 5:18: *For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.* That includes promises such as this. But is this a promise for the modern nation of Israel then? No. Because they are NOT the people who are called by the name of God. They have rejected God's name. They refuse to be baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. So is this a promise then to 'Christian' nations like the United States? While the United States might have been founded as a Christian nation, it has long since ceased to be one. Just look at its actions, and we see that Jesus Christ is not the Lord of the United States.

This promise is only to those whose king is Jesus Christ. But Jesus' kingdom is not like the other kingdoms of this world. Jesus' kingdom is mixed among the nations. So that means that this verse doesn't mean anything anymore, right? Well, are you so sure? I don't know about you, but there is much that needs repentance. Our nation surely needs to repent of the evils that have been done, especially the murder of children that has for years been protected as a "human right." But, Roe v. Wade was overturned, so that means we've done it, right? No. Now it's simply not automatically legal to kill your unborn children. Yet, in so many states, including Kansas, it is still very legal to kill the unborn. And many states have made it easier than it ever was

before. Our nation still has much to repent of, and I'm amazed that God has let it endure as long as it has.

But what about us Christians who live here in the United States? We also have much to repent of. But Pastor, surely Christians aren't those who need to turn from their wicked ways, they should be the ones who are showing the rest of the world the righteous ways of Jesus Christ, right? But are we? Are we really any different from the world around us? If an alien came down to earth, would he be able to tell the difference between a Christian and someone who denies Christ? In America? I doubt it. We aren't the salt and the light that we're supposed to be. We're too worried about losing our comfortable existence. Not all of us; many did wake up in 2020, but not enough. Too many followed the wicked command to abandon church and have never come back. We need to repent of our fear, of our apathy, of our desire for comfort rather than truth.

For Jesus will ultimately come to heal our land. And that will only come through destruction. For the heavens and the earth MUST pass away before the new heavens and the new earth can come to be. So, it's going to be hard; it might not look like any healing that we would expect. But we know that Jesus Christ has promised that He will raise us from the dead, and that we will reign with Him forever because of His death for us on the cross. So, let us repent, let us turn to Him, for He hears us and will not forsake us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Romans 8:28

AUGUST 2025

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28

This month's installment of "Did God Really Say?" addresses a verse that was highly requested, but one that wasn't on my list originally. I had to do some research to find out how exactly this verse was being misused. And that's the dastardly thing about the misuse of this verse: it's not an overt thing that you can easily see through, like some of the other Scripture-twisting that we've talked about in the past. This one is more insidious. So, how exactly is this verse misused? How should we read this verse? Is this verse a source of comfort or a mirror to expose our sins? Let's take a deeper look at this.

We'll start with how this verse gets misused. The most common is when this verse is quoted thoughtlessly to someone who is suffering. It's likely that the person saying it simply doesn't know what to say in the face of suffering, and so they think that quoting this verse of Scripture will be the best. If you ever feel like this, please stop yourself. Instead, look at what Job's friends do when he is suffering. *Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place... So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great.* (Job 2:11a, 13) So why is this the "go-to" verse for some people when they see suffering? Because they don't want to sit and listen to someone's grief. After all, how can you complain about something that God is going to use for good? So instead of being silent and listening to the grief, of helping to shoulder the burden of one who is suffering, they tell you to shut up, in the nicest way possible. And they use the Scriptures to do so. This is not what St. Paul is talking about in this verse or the verses surrounding it. Right before this, St. Paul says in Romans 8:22-23: *For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.* In other words, we are supposed to cry out to God, even in our suffering, especially in our suffering. We aren't supposed to remain silent, but to call out to God our Father, even if we don't know what to say.

Because we will experience suffering in this world, that is something that can't be avoided. St. Paul says in Romans 8:29: *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.* How are we to be conformed to the image of Jesus? Through suffering. Jesus suffered in this world, and so will we. And yet, from that great suffering, from the crucifixion of Jesus, comes the greatest good that we can ever experience, the forgiveness of sins. Now Jesus is the firstborn, the chief example of this. But from our suffering too will come good. But when we're in the midst of suffering, we can't always see it. And the good isn't always what we expect it to be, and it looks nothing like the world expects it to be. The world tries to sell Christians on this false narrative, that if you "give your life to Jesus then you will have your best life now." And either this drives Christians to despair because they are suffering, or gets them to embrace a false Christianity that pushes against the world, that doesn't suffer because it doesn't follow Christ; rather, it follows the god of this world. The good that comes from our suffering is often a spiritual good, something that we can't see, especially during the suffering. However, we can look back later on in our lives and see.

Ultimately, this verse is a verse of comfort to us. We see it play out time and time again in Scriptures, how the world tries to do wickedness to God's people, only for God to use it for their benefit. Think of Joseph and his story, with being sold into slavery, ending up falsely accused and imprisoned. Yet he says this to his brothers, *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."* (Genesis 50:20) If you are suffering right now, call out to God, yell and scream at Him if you must. Cry out in your pain and suffering; the Holy Spirit knows how to translate your pain into the proper prayers. But you aren't suffering needlessly. You are suffering because the world hates you just like it hates Jesus. And that suffering can't undo the blessings of Jesus Christ, for God will use it for your benefit, and the benefit of those around you. Trust in Him, lean on your brothers and sisters in Christ, and He will take you through this. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ephesians 4:15

SEPTEMBER 2025

[B]ut, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

Ephesians 4:15

"The world is like a drunken peasant. If one helps him into the saddle on one side, he will fall off on the other side." Martin Luther (Luther's Works, vol. 54, p. 111). Much in Christianity is this way, that we have to operate on this narrow road, not pulling too far to the right or the left, because in an attempt to prevent falling off on the one side, we will end up falling off on the other side. Jesus says in Matthew 7:13-14: *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."* So it is with today's verse, which talks about speaking the truth in love. So what are the two "ditches" that we are trying to avoid? How do we properly navigate between the two? What can we use as a guiding principle in our lives to help with this?

First, the greater context of the verse will help us understand it. This verse is the middle of a long run-on sentence that Paul is speaking, spanning verses 11-16. And this one sentence is part of the longer section that Paul is teaching, where he is talking about how we, as Christians, have unity in Christ. That even in this unity, there are



differences between members, that God has put them there for our good. And part of that good is to educate and help us grow. Part of this education includes being able to stand our ground in the face of false doctrine, and then also respond to this false doctrine with the truth. That truth, of the true teaching of Jesus Christ, is to be spoken in love.

So first let us consider the ditch of pure truth, untempered by love. In social situations, this is simply seen as rude and boorish behavior. Those who claim that they "just tell the truth" are those who are bullies and simply desire to tear others down, rather than being some bastion of philosophical and moral truth. And nobody whom you love really wants to hear the truth without love. It's a trite example, but when a wife asks her husband, "Does this dress make me look fat?" she doesn't want to hear, "No, it's you being fat that makes you look fat." Even if that is the truth. But how does this apply to what Paul says here? Here would be how to take that previous example and apply this principle to it. "I don't think so, honey. But, if you feel fat, why don't we start working out together?" Probably still going to land you in the doghouse, but there is a loving way provided out from the situation.

So what does this truth without love look like in a biblical context? The most prominent example is the Westboro Baptist Church, who will hold signs at protests like, "F**s burn in hell" or "God hates you." Yes, the sexually immoral who refuse to repent will burn in hell. Yes, God hates those who embrace sin and reject Him. Truth without love is often partial truth, leaving out the full counsel of God.

But what about the other ditch? What about love without truth? Let's continue to use the husband and wife example. The love without truth would be, "No, honey, the mirror must be warped, I'll go get another one later." Love that wishes to spare the feelings and by doing so, denies the truth. Today we see this in many of the liberal denominations that have abandoned God's Word for the social mores of our sinful world. They will say that God is love, and love is love, and so same-sex attraction and marriage must be God-pleasing. Despite God's Word clearly saying that this isn't so. But they are so worried about being loving, that they reject the truth of God's Word.

Instead, we are called to speak the truth in love. We are called to avoid both sides of this, to speak God's truth, but the whole of it. Yes, God hates sin, but Jesus died to save the sinner. Yes, God forgives sins, but not so that the sinner may go on sinning; rather, Jesus calls them to go and sin no more. Sadly, many today use this verse to attempt to shut down any discussion of the truth, because they see God's truth as unloving. But that very attempt is actually unloving. It is the equivalent of saying that doctors shouldn't tell their patients that they have cancer. After all, it only makes them

sad, and the treatment for it is difficult and painful. Instead it's more loving to lie to them and hide their cancer until it's too late, and they die from it. No, the truth might be painful, but the loving thing is to tell someone that they have cancer as early as possible, before it's too late to fight and cure. So it is with sin. It is more loving to tell someone that they have a spiritual cancer, and it will lead to eternal death, but Jesus Christ has the cure for it. So, brothers and sisters, keep speaking with love, and keep speaking the truth, and keep them together for the benefit of your neighbor. In Jesus' name, Amen.

1 John 4:8

OCTOBER 2025

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 John 4:8

This month in "Did God Really Say?" we tackle a verse that is familiar to so many of us. You probably remember singing the song, "Praise Him, All Ye Little Children." It starts, "Praise Him, praise Him, all ye little children, God is love, God is love." We're familiar with this concept, but I doubt we've ever really stopped and thought about what this means. So today we're going to take a deeper look at what exactly it means that God is love, and how we can know Him through it.

So let's start by defining love. What is the definition of love? Well, there are 8 definitions for it in Webster's Dictionary, and I think that's a large part of this problem. It's such a broad word in the English language. In fact, this one word encompasses three different words in the Greek. There are three Greek words that all get translated as "Love." These words are ἔρως (eros), φιλία (philia), and ἀγάπη (agape). While these words are much more nuanced, the simple way to think about them is that eros is lust, philia is familial love, and agape is a selfless, unconditional love. Eros has its place inside the marriage, as this love belongs between husband and wife, and is good there. It's when it is expressed outside of marriage that it becomes a problem. Philia is the most commonly encountered love in this world, as it's the love of a brother for a sister, the love of a mother for a child, the love of a friend for another. Agape is not a love that is encountered without the Holy Spirit. For no one can love selflessly or unconditionally without the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And yes, John does declare that "God is agape." And John knows this because he was there when Jesus spoke these words to His disciples in John 15:13: *Greater love*

has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. Jesus shows us His great love on the cross, when He lays down His life for all of mankind. And that's what He promised in John 3:16: *For God in this way loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* So if you do not know the Jesus who died on the cross for your sins, you do not know agape love. You can discover the other types of love in this life, but this one has to be revealed to you, has to be shown to you by Jesus Christ Himself.

Now, how does this verse get misused? Well, have you ever heard the catchphrase, "Love is love?" This phrase is one of the Devil's favorites. It takes this strange blend of all of these different types of love in the Greek language, and mixes them together and twists the Scriptures with them. Jesus is not eros love, but this world is obsessed with eros. Think about it. You can't have two men or two women display philia love toward one another without someone questioning whether or not they are gay. The Scriptures reject this, and we need to start rejecting this harmful thinking too. By reducing all love to eros, Satan has caused us to close ourselves off to many aspects of philia, and this is harmful to mankind. *And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone"* (Genesis 2:18a). We are meant to be social creatures, and part of being social is having that camaraderie that philia gives.

Satan also attempts to twist this verse by saying, "If God is love, then why are you being unloving by telling people that their sin is going to send them to Hell?" And this really hits home after the recent events in this world. Satan has destroyed many people's ability to discern the difference between disagreement and hatred. It is not hatred to warn someone that their sin is in danger of sending them to Hell. No, that is, in fact, the loving thing to say. If we truly hated gay people, we would keep silent and let them head straight to hell. But we love them, as Christ does. And Christ didn't tell the woman caught in adultery to go and continue in her sins. No, He told her to "Go and sin no more." (John 8:11b)

Ultimately, the greatest defense against taking this verse out of context is to read it in context. I encourage you, beloved brothers and sisters, to go to 1 John 4, and read the entire chapter, and let our Lord explain it to you better than I ever could. In Jesus' loving name, Amen.

2 Peter 3:8

NOVEMBER 2025

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

2 Peter 3:8

How many of you have ever seen one of these "Bible Code" predictions where they take some prophecy, and through a series of passages that deal with various numbers, apply a mathematical formula to what is said, and they come up with a supposed date for "the end of the world"? I've seen at least three of these happen in my time, and the world is still turning. So how do they come up with these things? Why do they come up with these things? And what does that have to do with our reading for this month in "Did God Really Say?" Well, let's take a look at these things in greater detail and we'll find our answers.

St. Peter here is quoting Moses, who writes Psalm 90. If you haven't, you should go and read Psalm 90, then come back to this article. It's too long to quote here, but I can sum it up. Moses is contrasting how brief the lives of humans are compared to the time that God has ruled over the heavens and the earth. So for such a being as God is, the time that one man is alive on earth has to seem but a passing moment. In hyperbole, Moses then says: *For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night.* (Psalm 90:4)

And it's not just that God has been around for a long time; it's that God has been around since before there was time. This is an impossible concept for us to understand. I explain it to the confirmation kids like this: Imagine that you are in a conversation with someone who was born blind. They've never been able to see a single thing their entire life. Now, it's your job to explain to them in words that they can understand, what the color purple is. No, you can't say that it's a combination of blue and red; someone who has never seen blue or red has no idea what those colors are. It is an impossible task. And that's what it's like if God were to try to explain to us what it's like to be eternal. What it's like to be outside of time. Because He is. He existed before time began, and He will exist long after time ends. Peter is drawing on this, that God is completely outside of time, and that the way that we perceive time isn't the way that it works for God.

And it's more than that as well. When Peter adds on that last bit, he's expanding on what Moses said. Moses was talking about how 1,000 years are like a day, but Peter

reverses it as well. Why would he do that? Because the Holy Spirit can use it to teach us about Jesus. Because there is a day coming; it's not here yet. A day when there will no longer be any night. A day that will last for "1,000 years." That's a figurative number, $10 \times 10 \times 10$ or 10^3 . 10, one of the numbers of completion. Taken to the third power, the number of the Trinity. So God's completion. And that is talking about the last day, when Jesus comes back. Because on that day, there will be no more time; time will be ended. And we will be in eternity. And then we will finally understand "purple."

So, Peter and Moses aren't establishing some hidden code that you can take the 40 days that Jesus was on earth and then multiply that by 1,000 and you'll figure out the actual year when Jesus is going to come back. That's not what's going on. Rather, Peter is talking about a profound reality. The reality that time isn't eternal. But God is. And we, being born in time, can't understand what that's like. But Jesus does. And He assures us that He's got this whole thing under control. He's had a plan since before time began, and His plan will endure beyond the end of time. Whether that comes in a day, or 1,000 years from now. Jesus has it under control. Brothers and sisters, put your trust in Jesus Christ, for He knows what you need, and will give it to you in the proper time. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Mark 10:15

DECEMBER 2025

"Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

Mark 10:15

You might be wondering why this verse would be here in our "Did God Really Say?" After all, it seems pretty straightforward, that we need to have a childlike faith. So, we're done here, right? Whoa, not so fast. Yes, Jesus is talking about having a childlike faith, but what does that mean? I don't think we have a good idea of what a childlike faith is. So, today we're going to explore what that means and what the Scriptures have to say about it, so let's get started.

If you were to ask someone just off the street what it means to have a childlike faith, what do you think the answer would be? Well, it would probably be something like this, "A childlike faith is a faith that, while it doesn't understand all the ins and outs of salvation, still believes in the promises of Jesus. It all boils down to John 3:16." So far,

we're good, this is a reasonable understanding of what Jesus is saying here in Mark 10. But, all too often, this is where people think that their faith journey ends. They've received this childlike faith from the Holy Spirit, so now there is no more reason that they need to grow in their faith, or attend church, or even open their Bibles. After all, they've got John 3:16 memorized, so that's enough, right? Just enough Jesus to guarantee that they can live their lives however they want, and that Jesus will still let them into heaven.

And that's the problem. Yes, Jesus is indeed talking about having a faith that trusts in what God has said and has promised. Yes, Jesus is talking about a faith that relies fully on Him and His death for us on the cross. But, Jesus never says that this faith doesn't grow. That we never get deeper into God's Word. On the contrary, if we receive our faith like a little child, that absolutely assumes that we are going to grow. The only little children who never grow are children who have died. Jesus Himself says in Matthew 22:32b: *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* We have been raised in the waters of our Baptism; we were spiritually dead but now we live. So that means that we have to grow. Not that we leave behind that childlike trust in the promises of our Lord, but that we hold onto those promises while learning more fully what He means in those promises.

We can't do that if we don't engage in His Word. If we think all that we need is John 3:16, we'll never grow. Ask a young child about his/her favorite dinosaur, or car, or cartoon, and then watch their eyes light up as they then share all the joy of that with you. They aren't content to just know the basics about it; they want to know EVERYTHING about it, and they want to share it with you. And that's how we should be with our faith. We should desire to know more, to dig deeper. But as long as we're content with just John 3:16, we'll never know what Jesus says in John 3:17, or 3:18, or any of the rest of the Scriptures. Jesus says in Matthew 7:21-23: *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"* He never knew them, because they thought that they didn't need to get to know Him. Let this not be us. Let us continue to grow in our faith, through the meeting together to receive His gifts and to study His Word. And let us pick up the Word even when we're at home, and dig deeper, continuing to cling to His promises. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Acts 2:44-45

JANUARY 2026

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

Acts 2:44-45

It's been an entire year that we've been on this series "Did God Really Say?" I hope that these have been helpful for you as you engage with the greater context of these verses. That being said, I want to encourage you that if you are interested in any other verses that you hear get taken out of context, please let me know. You can do it anonymously through a note dropped off at the church, or you can email a question or just ask me. Now, let's get down to these verses in Acts 2 and see how they get taken out of context, and what they really do say.

These verses describe what happens in the early Church, and many see these as a call to establish a communist government. After all, what is described here is clearly the communist ideal, and so, as Christians, it's clear that Jesus has called for us to establish this. Or so the argument goes for those who advocate such a system. And those who use this verse to advocate for such a system fall into a common error. They have turned a descriptive text into a prescriptive text.

Pastor, what do you mean by that? Well, the text from Acts describes the events that take place in Jerusalem immediately following Peter's sermon on Pentecost and how the new Christian Church organized itself during those days in the city of Jerusalem. Note, Peter does not say that this is how Christians are to organize wherever they might be. Jesus does not come down from on high and give the order for His people to sell all their possessions and have everything in common. Instead, Luke is recording what took place in the city of Jerusalem during those days.

But why did this happen in this way? Well, Jesus had warned them that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed. This city, where these men and women were living, was going to be reduced to rubble by the year AD 70. They did not know the year that this was going to happen, but Jesus did warn them that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed. *"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her."* (Luke 21:20-21) So this congregation was able to sell their homes, sell their possessions, and pool their resources and live together communally. They did this knowing that the time

would come when they would have to flee, and their possessions would only weigh them down on that day.

So, Jerusalem and her congregation were a special case, where God had said that He was going to destroy that city. His warning to His people let them know that there would come a time to flee, so that they should be ready to flee when the time had come. So they did. They sold their land, their goods, and were ready to leave. Some chose to remain, not in opposition to God, but to continue to preach Jesus Christ to those who remained behind. James the Just, the brother of Jesus, was one of those. But these conditions were not replicated in Ephesus, or in Thessalonica, or in Corinth. In these congregations, they did not sell all that they had and live communally. They continued to live and work in the community and support the work of the Gospel on top of everything else.

Does this mean that Christians shouldn't live like this? No, it doesn't mean that either. If you and a group of people choose to pool your money, purchase some land, and live communally, there is nothing wrong with that. In many ways, you become a very tight-knit community by doing this. But you can't force a brother or sister in Christ to join you just because you think it's better for them. Involuntary communism is nothing less than theft. God has given you the blessings you have to steward them. He has not made you steward over other people's blessings, for you to tell them what they must do with them. You can give advice, but ultimately they are responsible before God. So, in the end, this verse describes what happened in Jerusalem, and does not prescribe what we must do to be saved. This is an important distinction that will serve you well in your study of the Bible once you master it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Romans 13:1-2

FEBRUARY 2026

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Romans 13:1-2 • NKJV

This month in "Did God Really Say?" we address a topic often avoided by Christians: our relationship with politics and government. Many have invoked these verses, especially since 2020, to justify various stances. Today, we will clarify what Romans 13



means for believers by examining its context, intended message, and application to our lives. Let's explore why this passage remains relevant, and what it truly requires of us.

Paul in Romans 12 talks about how a Christian is to live in their day-to-day life. They are not to be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of their mind (12:2). They are to live together with fellow Christians, bear one another up, and even, if possible, live in peace with their neighbors who are not Christians. And when they are wronged, they are not to form a mob and seek out their own retribution, but to leave it to God. Instead, we are to care for our enemies (12:20). And one of the ways that God will carry out that vengeance is through the governing authorities. When a murderer is arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced, it is God working justice. Sometimes, justice in this world is corrupted and partial. After all, in this world we will face persecution, but we know that a day is coming when there will be true justice, when those who do not trust in Jesus Christ will receive the full payment for their sins, eternal death in hell.

But what about when the government tries to force you to do something that is contrary to the faith? For example, if they declare that meeting together as the body of Christ is illegal. The government in China does this, and other governments throughout the ages have. In fact, in Rome, while Paul is writing this, Christianity is in this current predicament. Peter responded to those in authority who commanded him to stop preaching Jesus Christ, "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29b) When the governing authorities command that you disobey the Scriptures, then you are free to ignore such a command, but you will suffer for it. The disciples who said that were jailed for preaching Christ. James was killed by Herod, and Peter was in prison, set to be killed the next day, before Jesus freed him. Martin Luther himself was declared a heretic by the Roman Church, and his emperor called him to trial. In Worms, he stood before the emperor and addressed the charges against him, and refused to recant even though his emperor demanded it. Was Luther breaking the command laid down in Romans 13 here? By standing on the Scriptures? By no means.

God has established government for the general good of all people, yet those in authority are still imperfect humans. Some who don't follow Christ may promote good social order but won't be truly righteous; even believers can be tyrannical but will be found righteous if they have faith in Christ. In America, as a constitutional republic, we have the duty to make informed choices at the polls and rely on peaceful, lawful means to address grievances. We do not have the right to riot, nor did Christians in Rome, who didn't protest for the right to worship. This verse is not an excuse for bad authorities or a club for argument; it's more nuanced. So, don't use it as a weapon

online—when tempted, step away, reread Romans 12-13, and reconsider. You'll likely realize online arguments are fruitless compared to focusing on your neighbors. In Jesus' name, Amen.

John 18:33, 36

MARCH 2026

Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" ... Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

John 18:33, 36

This month in our series, "Did God Really Say?" we tackle the reality of the Kingdom of God. What does it mean that God's kingdom is not of this world? Where does that place us? How do we handle our citizenship in this world, and what is the relationship between these two realities? Let's take a closer look and answer these questions.

Let's start then with some definitions. The simple definition of citizenship is the legal status of being a member of a particular country, granting specific rights and responsibilities. Now, some countries allow their citizens to hold dual citizenship, but others do not. Another important word is sojourner. This refers to someone who is a citizen of a country that they are not currently living in. For some reason, they have to live outside their country for a time, but their intent is to return as soon as they are able. They are protected by some of the laws in the country where they currently reside, but are not full citizens. This is different from an immigrant, who desires citizenship in the country they now reside in and is actively working to assimilate into the culture and become a citizen of that country. Aliens are individuals who have no citizenship and are not seeking citizenship.

Most of you who are reading this will be citizens of the United States of America. You were likely born here and have been a citizen your entire life. Modern-day sojourners would be refugees who intend to return home as soon as it is safe. Some sojourners cease to be sojourners, giving up their citizenship in their previous country to become citizens in the country where they live.

So, what is our relationship to God's Kingdom? Are we citizens, sojourners, or aliens? Those who have been baptized are citizens in the kingdom of God. And by being citizens in God's Kingdom, they have given up their citizenship in the kingdom of this



world. *If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:19)* Also, *for our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 3:20)* We cannot have dual citizenship between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this world. For Satan has usurped control of this world, and will not tolerate any dual citizens, nor do those who are children of the light have anything to do with the darkness. Yes, that does mean that we are sojourners currently, living our lives in this kingdom of the world, but we are not citizens. We live here for a time, but when our Lord calls us home, we gladly return to His Kingdom, and we live our lives according to His will.

But what does that mean for our citizenship in a nation? Should we renounce citizenship or avoid politics? By no means. God's Word guides us in every area, including politics. Politics simply concerns the matters of the city. Therefore, exercise your rights and responsibilities as a citizen in line with God's Word. Advocate for the rights of the unborn, stand for the biblical definition of marriage, and oppose no-fault divorce. These are matters on which God has spoken, and we cannot deny His Word as citizens of His kingdom. If you have the talent to govern, run for office and support the good that God's Word outlines.

But Pastor, that sounds like "Christian Nationalism!" It's not. It's just being a Christian whose citizenship is in heaven, but who is sojourning here in this world. Remember what God told His people to do during their exile in Babylon: *Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace. (Jeremiah 29:5-7)* So, as faithful sojourners here, seek your neighbor's good, pursue peace, and do the will of your King, Jesus Christ. In His name, Amen.

Romans 13:1-7

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"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from

the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor."

Romans 13:1-7

This month, we're tackling a section of the Scriptures that was misused against many Christians during the pandemic to shut down churches. So we're going to look at what the Scriptures do say about earthly authorities, what they don't say, and how to hold the tension when an earthly authority contradicts God's Word.

Paul writes this to the Church in Rome, where Christianity was technically illegal. Judaism had a legal exception, but whether Christianity qualified was debated. It was a civic duty to participate in local religion to appease the gods for the city's well-being. Those who refused were labeled "atheists" and seen as criminals. Paul addresses related issues in Romans 10, such as buying meat from the sacrificial market. Now he explains that even the Roman Emperor is God's servant. The Old Testament shows God using pagan leaders, like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, for His plans. Governments, even those opposed to Jesus, curb evil and fulfill God's law in this way. Even godless regimes recognize murder as wrong. Thus, the government remains God's instrument for good. We should obey the laws for the sake of ourselves and our neighbors, provided they do not contradict God's Word. Jesus affirms this about taxes: *"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* (Matthew 22:21b)

But what happens when Caesar tries to demand the things that are God's? What happens when the government elevates its laws above God's? This is where we follow the example of Peter and John. They were told by the rightful authority, the council in Jerusalem, that they were not to teach or preach about Jesus and the resurrection. They were arrested for it once, let off with a warning, and told not to do it again. But they didn't listen, and they did it again the very next day. *So they were arrested again. "And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, 'Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!' But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'"* (Acts 5:27-29) So, when a law or policy or guidance from the



governing authorities comes down contrary to God's Word, it is our duty as Christians to refuse to obey that law. Christians continued to meet in secret, even though Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire. They didn't listen to the Emperor, who told them that they couldn't meet together. They didn't resort to church by mail. They met together.

Christians in the United States face an unusual situation compared to Christians in other countries and throughout history. Because the United States is a democratic republic, as citizens, we have a unique duty and opportunity to participate in our government. This means that when governing authorities establish laws, policies, or guidance that are contrary to God's Word, it is our responsibility as US citizens to seek a remedy. Whether that means working to repeal or enact a law, initiating a recall election, or even running for office ourselves, we should use whatever remedies are realistically available in our American system. While we pursue these avenues, we must continue to obey God rather than man, even if it means suffering. *"So [the apostles] departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."* (Acts 5:41-42) Let us continue living as Christians, according to God's Word, no matter what the world around us thinks or does. In Jesus' name, Amen.