

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Saving Society

Tad Morris

If you like to worry, the world offers a buffet of things to worry about. Healthcare availability and affordability, racism and social justice, college affordability and student debt, voting rights and election integrity, climate change and green energy, gun violence and gun control, poverty and homelessness, sexual abuse and human trafficking, and many, many more. Some of these issues are real, and some are not. Some are significant issues for Christians, and some are not. We live in a strange world where social issues are invented for the sake of causing chaos and controlling people.

Not all social issues need to be taken seriously. One advocacy organization listed *speciesism* in the top 15 most important social issues of our time. They said, “

Speciesism exists all around us: animals are used as food, amusement, and laboratory test subjects. They are frequently regarded as "less than" people, and so as worthless commodities. In actuality, they are other creatures with rights and emotions who share our world with us.

Should animals be abused? No, but nor should they be treated as sentient creatures with equal rights and emotions. Our society is beginning to look strikingly similar to the one described in **Romans 1:24-25**:

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

What should we do about this broken society? Be careful because there is a real danger in getting distracted. Paul said in **2 Timothy 2:4**, “No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.” We cannot risk over-investing in things that will not pay back any eternal, spiritual rewards. I may have an opinion

on the economy, but it’s not really a Christian issue. It’s not relevant to my faith or salvation. My opinion may be informed by biblical principles, and my opinion may be absolutely right, but it’s nonetheless an opinion and not a concern for the church. I may have an opinion on the affordability of college and student debt, but it’s not really a Christian issue. It’s not a church issue. It’s not relevant to our faith or our salvation. We

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may have well-developed positions on many social issues that are rather important from a secular perspective, but we should be careful not to make them issues of faith, fellowship, or church business.

Don’t let things that matter a little interfere with the things that matter the most. Jesus set an example for how to handle these peripheral issues. **Luke 12:13-15**:

Then one from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”

Jesus knew the right solution to this problem, but he didn’t bother giving an answer. This issue was not his business or

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How Will We Respond?

Jay Graham

mission in life. Avoiding covetousness is more important than settling an estate. So it is with Christians. We may have the right answer for many secular issues, but we must not let secular issues interfere with our mission and business as Christians and as the Church.

What about the issues that do matter? When and how does a Christian stand up to the godless propaganda of wokeism? How do you resist the LGBTQ+ agenda? How do we fix a society that kills its children? Extreme views on this subject do exist. On the one hand, there's the camp that says Christians are personally responsible to be socially engaged and that political activism is a God-given duty. I understand this feeling, but there's a problem: If the church begins to engage in political activism or social reform, where does it stop? How does the church allocate resources? How does the church measure success and failure in these activities? Is this what Jesus had in mind? If the church advocates for the laws of the land to reflect the laws that govern Christians, where does this stop? Should we also advocate for the banning of homosexuality? What about banning immodesty and pre-marital sex? What about advocating for mandatory church attendance? Do we really want a theocracy? Investing in social change may seem virtuous, but it is possible to overstate these victories. In fact, political victories might not be victories at all.

If you really want to do something important in your community, go introduce yourself to your neighbors. Show them the love of Christ. Let them see the peace that passes understanding. Let them see your convictions. Let your light shine where you are. We can't save society. That's above our pay grade. But we can be an instrument in saving people *from* society. **Acts 2:40**: "*Be saved from this perverse generation.*"

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Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain (Philippians 2:14-16).

Here in the 21st century, at least in our society, God's word is being challenged on many levels. Included in these levels are challenges to the Lord's many divine truths. These truths are not simply refused; many are actively seeking their destruction. The Lord's people live by these truths regularly, for they give us stable, healthy lives, and provide foundations we can live by and on that, man's truths cannot provide.

The question I ask in this article is "How will we respond" to these attacks and attempts to tear down our spirits and the temptation to "blend in with the crowds?" We will be tempted to respond in kind. Our temptation will be to call those who oppose the Lord names, for that is how we are being treated. However, when we sink to this level of dialogue, we are not projecting the spirit of the Lord. And such responses do not encourage those we may be calling "names" to follow the Lord. They are only encouraging them to blaspheme the Lord further.

We are tempted to yell and scream at those we perceive as our enemies. To carry signs and "protest" what they are doing. This also is not the Lord's way. It can be very difficult to respond and answer in a godly manner when we, ourselves, are being mistreated. Our nature is to "fight back" with how we are being treated. However, we must be encouraged to always answer humbly and with love for those we are trying to convince. We are urged to "*give an answer for the hope that is in us*" (**1 Peter 3:15**) in a godly and holy manner rather than resort to our true enemy's nature, that of Satan. The world is NOT our enemy. We do not wish them spiritual harm, for we should want them to repent and be saved, just as we are on the path toward salvation. We need to remember that the Lord wants all to be saved, including those challenging His truths and His people.

Let us consider some of the many examples in the Scriptures of how the Lord's people answered such challenges from the world. I like how Daniel responded when he was commanded to not pray to anyone but King Darius in **Daniel 6**, and in particular, look at his response in **verse 10**. He prayed three times each day! It did not matter to him what the decree demanded. He was only interested in what the Lord

commanded, and His God asked him to pray. He did not retaliate, but simply continued praying. The Lord surely was pleased with his spirit. The end result was that King Darius honored God at the close of that chapter!

I especially like how those we know as Daniel's friends responded in **Daniel 3**. They were commanded not only to bow before the golden image of King Nebuchadnezzar but they were also commanded not to bow before their God. Their response is noted in **verse 16** of that chapter. They declared they would not bow down to the golden image, even though it may cost them a horrible death. The Lord was surely pleased with their response. Also, note how Nebuchadnezzar gave glory to the Lord at the end of that chapter! In both of these instances, the Lord was glorified as a result of their faith.

We go to the New Testament in Acts chapters four and five. In **Acts 4:18-20**, the Jewish leaders forbade them from preaching the name of the Lord. It is interesting they did not command the Christians to not believe in Jesus; they just commanded them not to preach in the name of Jesus. Peter responded in **verses 19-20**: "*Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*" After they were released, what did they do in **verse 23**? They met with their brethren and asked the Lord for boldness!

Again, in **Acts 5:22-32** the apostles were commanded not to teach in the name of the Lord. They responded in **verses 29-32**, "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*" When they were released from custody, they praised the Lord, that they were allowed to suffer for His name. What a great response!

The world hates Christ, and the world hates His Christians. The world desires we either be convinced to serve their gods and ideas or be destroyed. Jesus taught his followers they would be persecuted for following and preaching in His name. This principle continues into our modern era.

Let us not allow our spirits to be lowered to Satan's level and those who follow him and his wickedness. Let us respond to such threats with grace, godly wisdom, and love. We also should want all men everywhere to be saved and respond with this goal in mind.

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The Fervor of the Early Saints

Thomas D. Dennis

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article appeared in the December, 1975 edition of *The Gospel Message*.

One of the outstanding features of the early New Testament church was the zealous spirit of evangelism that seemed to fill the heart of every saint. The same enthusiasm with which Peter preached on the day of Pentecost was a driving force in the lives of the brethren. Even to this day men are impressed by the boldness of Peter and John standing daily in the temple proclaiming Christ. Time and again, the Jews would seize them, imprison them, and even inflict physical beating. And in the midst of such opposition, the Biblical record tells us that the brethren prayed that God would grant them boldness to speak the word. When called before the Jewish council and strictly commanded not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, they responded fearlessly with such comments as "*We ought to obey God rather than men*" (**Acts 5:29**) and "*We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*" (**Acts 4:20**). All the threats and abuse from the Jews who understood not God's plan of redemption through Christ could not deter the brethren from proclaiming the risen Lord. And the effectiveness of their preaching was so felt that even the Sanhedrin despidngly admitted that Jerusalem had been filled with the doctrine of Christ, and the council members marveled at the boldness of the disciples.

When the enemies of truth could not resist the wisdom and the spirit by which Stephen spake, they resorted to disreputable methods of obtaining testimony whereby he might be condemned to death. But the same zeal with which Stephen had preached was displayed even in his death, for he died praying to the Lord in whom he believed and whom he had proclaimed unto them. The killing of Stephen initiated a wave of violent opposition against the church, and the brethren scattered from Jerusalem. Incredible as it may seem, they went everywhere preaching the word. By this unquenchable fervor and zeal, the gospel was spread hastily.

It is most highly improbable that the brethren had any formal system of community evangelism or any predetermined



Please check your expiration date!

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evening set aside for a weekly visitation program. Can you even imagine how absurd it would have seemed to those brethren for someone to suggest a contest to see who could bring the most people to "Sunday school?" They founded no missionary societies, no schools to teach the Bible, and no organizations or institutions other than congregations of the Lord's church. These were souls on fire for Jesus, just simply telling everyone they could about His love, His power, and His saving grace.

Paul, who formerly had been an opponent of the church, was converted, and the zeal with which he defended the gospel was of the same caliber that he had seen manifested by Stephen and others of the saints. He unflinchingly proclaimed, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek"* (Romans 1:16). He wrote to Timothy, *"Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God"* (2 Timothy 1:8).

Brethren, the church is still the *"pillar and ground of the truth"* (1 Timothy 3:15) and it is God's eternal purpose that *"by the church"* the manifold wisdom of God be made known to all men (Ephesians 3:10). May God help us in these latter days to be salt to season the world, and a light to direct men out of darkness into the glorious way of the Lord.

Glory to God!

The Chapel Glen Church of Christ, Indianapolis, IN rejoiced when Lincoln and Logan Kirby were baptized on April 28.

The church in Fayette, MO welcomed Tec and Sheila Chapman as members on May 12.

Special Meetings

2024 Meetings

June 8-9.....	Vandalia, IA
June 17-20.....	Shaver Lake, CA
July 1-5.....	Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO
July 20-26.....	Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO
August 31-September 1.....	Pleasant Hill, IA
September 29.....	Braymer, MO
October 4-6.....	Fall Campout, Unionville, MO

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