



*"A refreshing look at discipleship  
in our late modern times."*

TIM KELLER

**JESUS**

**OUTSIDE**

**THE**

**LINES**

*a way forward  
for those who are  
tired of taking sides*

**Scott Sauls**

foreword by **GABE LYONS**

*Jesus Outside the Lines* is a refreshing look at discipleship in our late modern times. While it's impossible to cover all the possible topics, Scott's book is still surprisingly comprehensive and readable at the same time. He seamlessly weaves together theology, cultural critique, Christian ethics, and character formation in each chapter. The result is a picture of Christian living that should be attractive to believers and to many skeptics as well.

**TIMOTHY KELLER**

Senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City, and author of *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*

As people who have wrestled much with God's habit of redemptively "coloring outside the lines" in our own lives and experience, we are so grateful for the wisdom, care, and honesty with which our friend and pastor Scott Sauls has approached this subject in this book.

**STEVEN CURTIS AND MARY BETH CHAPMAN**

Five-time Grammy winners and orphan-care advocates

My friend Scott Sauls is winsome, gifted, smart, compassionate—and tired. Tired of name-calling and caricatures. Tired of the unloving tone that sadly typifies so much of our public and private discourse. Tired of divisive dogmatism that flies in the face of Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17. He longs to see Christians marked first and foremost by love. He recognizes the beauty in being "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry" (James 1:19). He rightly understands that if you're always pointing out what's wrong with everyone else, it reveals just how much you've built your identity on being right. But he's no pessimist. And he's no soft sentimentalist. He's not calling for uniformity. And he's not championing the watering down of legitimate Christian distinctives. In the gospel of Jesus Christ, he sees a transformative power that can set us free—free to listen, to lose, and to love. Free to be bold without being brash, confident without being cocky, smart without being sassy, engaged with our world without being enraged with our neighbor. Thank you, Scott, for doing what you do and for saying what you say. It is much needed in our day.

**TULLIAN TCHIVIDJIAN**

Founder of Liberate and author of *One Way Love: Inexhaustible Grace for an Exhausted World*

Scott Sauls has given me fresh hope in this thoughtful and lively book, *Jesus Outside the Lines*. He describes hope as imagining God's future into the present and does just that. He gives us a new way of relating to each other inside the church—especially on divisive topics related to our politics and commitments—in hopes of sweeter aroma to those who don't know Jesus. And he prods us to engage the issues of the world we live in—poverty, abortion, sexual “freedom,” and selfish ambition, to name a few—with humility and love. It's so easy to be discouraged by the broken state of the church and the world, but Scott reminds us that God's once-and-for-all restoration project has already begun. We only need to believe that gospel!

**KATHERINE LEARY ALSDORF**

Founder and director emeritus, Redeemer Center for Faith & Work,  
and co-author of *Every Good Endeavor*

As a public official, I am often painfully aware of the church's tendency to want to paint lines that divide rather than drawing pictures of a life-giving Savior. As an exemplary model of speaking truth in love, Scott is a refreshing alternative to this. I am among many who have the privilege of trying to figure out how to do this alongside him.

**BILL HASLAM**

Governor of Tennessee

My pastor and friend, Scott Sauls, thoughtfully challenges the instinct to retreat or compromise when perspectives collide. With grace and humility, he calls us to press in and engage those whose perspectives are different than our own. If you are weary of the pressure to choose sides and declare an enemy, *Jesus Outside the Lines* will show you a refreshingly different path.

**TROY TOMLINSON**

President and CEO of Sony ATV Music Nashville

I used to wonder why my dear friend Scott Sauls wasn't already a published author, for I've learned so much from my younger brother. But I'm glad he waited. *Jesus Outside the Lines* isn't a first book; it's more like fine wine, distilled wisdom, and the vintage aroma of grace. Thank you, Scott, for showing me that Christianity is both true *and* beautiful; that I matter, but that I'm not the

point; that the family of God is bigger than my favorite tribe in the family; that contextualizing the gospel isn't compromising the gospel; that God loves the world, not just people in the world; that Jesus isn't nervously pacing the corridors of heaven, he's actively making all things new. Thank you, Scott, for reminding me the gospel is *so much* bigger and better than I can imagine.

SCOTTY SMITH

Founder of Christ Community Church in Franklin, Tennessee, and author of *Everyday Prayers*

We live in cultural moment that has made it feel almost impossible for Christians to find their voice. We feel silenced, marginalized, and in need of defending ourselves. But this reaction has not helped. Choosing sides in the larger cultural conflicts has only left us feeling misunderstood, stereotyped, and caricatured. We long for another way. And this is what Scott has given us in this book. With theological insight, cultural astuteness, and the compassionate tone of Jesus, he paints a way for the church to have influence without coercion and put the brilliance of Jesus on display in a pluralistic world. A worthy read.

JON TYSON

Founding pastor of Trinity Grace Church, New York, and author of *Sacred Roots: Why the Church Still Matters*

Scott Sauls is my pastor and friend. He is a man who deeply loves Christ. He is not a Christian writer as much as he is a writer and pastor and father and husband and brother and son who is a Christian, a follower of Christ. Scott's words will challenge you, make you mad and happy, make you cry and make you laugh. Art is supposed to make you feel something and glorify God all at the same time. I believe he accomplishes that!

TOM DOUGLAS

Hall of Fame songwriter

As a pastor, it's a given that Scott would comb the Scriptures for answers to so many cultural issues we're facing today; but he also puts his own story and life into each chapter. I'm so thankful for the overall tone of the book, which combines bold, substantive truth with humility and grace. *Jesus Outside the Lines* will be an

amazing companion to those of us attempting to be “salt and light” in our world.

**LEE NORWOOD**

Senior vice president of men’s design, Polo Ralph Lauren

The deepest learning we do is always over the shoulder and through the heart. In *Jesus Outside the Lines*, Scott Sauls invites everyone everywhere into an honest conversation about the things that matter most—and therefore at the same time are the most tender and contentious for us. But he does so as a friend, offering thoughtful, rich, even pastoral counsel for believer and unbeliever alike, longing as he does that we find ways to flourish as human beings who have commitments and convictions about God, politics, money, sexuality, and more, agreeing to disagree where we must, but with love and respect, with listening and friendship. In our polarizing world, where the more we know about each other means the less we care for each other, Scott’s vision is a gift for those who care for our common good.

**STEVEN GARBER**

Founder and principal of the Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation & Culture and author of *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good*

I’ve always valued my conversations and friendship with Scott Sauls, particularly when it comes to his vision of countercultural acts of love, justice, and service. As a QB in the NFL for the past seventeen years, I appreciate Scott putting to paper the feelings and discussions that we often engage in amidst the locker-room setting. Scott boldly and bravely addresses polarizing issues we deal with today in ways I’ve previously never considered. Thoughtfully reflecting on *Jesus Outside the Lines*, I realize this book paints a clear picture of what I hope to become as a follower of Christ.

**MATT HASSELBECK**

NFL quarterback

Scott Sauls is a refreshing voice, seasoned with maturity and grace regarding the complex issues of our time. He tackles topics that have long created division with such heartfelt hope that I’m more encouraged than ever about the future of the church.

**REBEKAH LYONS**

Cofounder of *Q* and author of *Freefall to Fly*

Scott takes on key issues in an honest and candid manner and helps us understand them in a way that is humane, biblical, and ultimately Christlike. I want to care more for my friends, be quicker to listen to others, and yet with more conviction live for the One who truly offers us life in all its fullness. *Jesus Outside the Lines* is a helpful companion for this endeavor.

**KEITH GETTY**

Hymn composer

*Jesus Outside the Lines* is a valuable encouragement in my quest to live with Jesus and follow his command to love my neighbor. Scott Sauls touches on the most relevant issues a follower of Jesus confronts in our present-day culture. He brings clarity and direction for living in a way that promotes Jesus and builds his Kingdom. Scott's thoughts are honest, refreshingly real, and, most of all, helpful to me. I have gained a more insightful understanding of how Jesus' thoughts should affect my own thoughts and how I can live out his commands in my day-to-day walk.

**BEN CRANE**

PGA Tour golf professional

In *Jesus Outside the Lines*, Scott Sauls has provided an insightful approach to engaging our world, which is too often fraught with deep-seated conflict and historical divisions. Scott calls us to affirm the dignity of all persons. He urges us to resist the temptation to see each other simply from our own perspective but to see each other as image bearers of God, challenging us to love our neighbors with a radical and honest humility.

**ELISE CHONG**

Executive director of Hope for New York

Scott Sauls has written a gem. *Jesus Outside the Lines* is brilliant, accessible, compelling, and compassionate. Scott has his finger on the pulse of a culture that has given up on inadequate representations of Jesus and the Christian faith. With a pastoral tone and apologetic skill, he debunks those misrepresentations and invites us into the joy of faithfully pursuing the biblical Jesus while he equips us to have a better dialogue with those who have yet to encounter him.

**JR VASSAR**

Pastor of Church at the Cross and author of *Glory Hunger: God, the Gospel, and Our Quest for Something More*

The kind of voice we increasingly need to help guide deep and respectful conversation around the claims of Jesus is one of humility, kindness, and humor. Judging by this book, Scott Sauls is beginning to emerge as one of our best voices.

**SAMMY RHODES**

Campus minister, writer, and humorist

In *Jesus Outside the Lines*, my pastor Scott Sauls provides a path for those less interested in “going to church” and more eager to “be the church.” He presses us toward a keen awareness of the image of God in humanity, thoughtfully engaging us to love each and every neighbor, not just a select few, even as we love ourselves. Scott calls us to subversive, countercultural acts of love, justice, and service for the common good with a vision to further the Kingdom of God in our time. If you are looking to be an active and life-giving contributor to God’s mission, you need to look no further than *Jesus Outside the Lines*.

**DANNY HERRON**

President/chief executive officer of Habitat for Humanity of Greater Nashville

The “conform or else” mentality of our late modern culture is disheartening, lamentable, and transgressive to human flourishing. Yet the root of the problem isn’t “out there” in our culture, but “in here” in our hearts. In *Jesus Outside the Lines*, Scott Sauls is authentic and vulnerable as he wisely and gently reminds us of our brokenness and shows us how the power and beauty of the gospel can heal us, from the inside out.

**BETHANY JENKINS**

Founder of the Park Forum and director of the Gospel Coalition’s “Every Square Inch”

Scott Sauls gives us a compelling vision for how to follow the real Jesus in real life. *Jesus Outside the Lines* is a guide to living in the fullness of God’s kingdom here on earth that helps followers of Jesus love both God and the world around them.

**DARRIN PATRICK**

Author, lead pastor of The Journey Church in St. Louis, Missouri, and vice president of the Acts 29 Network

From disagreements to unity, from outrage to true humility, Scott Sauls's *Jesus Outside the Lines* offers grace as the compelling alternative to the current social norms of judgment and reductionism. Fueled by how Jesus embodied his words and loved his enemies, Scott's book offers a conversational and winsome reminder to be attentive to particulars in a world of generalities. The book is an invitation to respect one another, even when we disagree. When this kind of generosity is the banner, truth and love come together and triumph over tribal divisions.

SANDRA McCracken

Singer/songwriter

I admire Scott Sauls as I admire few other pastors. And now all of us can benefit from him through his writing. *Jesus Outside the Lines* is the message we need to hear right now, as our nation is so deeply divided. Just imagine the peace we could enjoy together if we erased our self-invented lines and let Jesus redraw them for us in his own unsettling, beautiful way. Scott's book can free us to do so.

RAY ORTLUND

Author and lead pastor of Immanuel Church in Nashville, Tennessee

As my former pastor and colleague, and now friend, I have always known Scott Sauls to provide thoughtful and considered perspectives on a wide range of topics and theological tangles. Though I differ in thinking from Scott on some points, I appreciate the way he approaches some of the more controversial issues facing the church and the world in the spirit of Christ and his desire for reconciliation. Scott knows so much about God's grace, and he shares that here in this book. I highly recommend it.

JULIET VEDRAL

Executive editor, *The Wheelhouse Review*

As Christians with strong convictions, we often feel the need to argue and defend our positions. And certainly, we should be prepared to give a reason for the hope we have and to articulate important doctrines. But as Scott explains, we can do so in a winsome way that doesn't alienate or demonize those who disagree with us. We need to seek to understand before seeking to be



understood. We need to extend grace and compassion. In short, if we want to change the current antagonistic culture that pervades much of the church, we must learn to love our enemies, not just our tribe. In *Jesus Outside the Lines*, Scott shows us how.

**JULIE ROYS**

Speaker, blogger, freelance journalist, and host of *Up for Debate*,  
a national talk program on the Moody Radio Network

In our age of explosion of readable media, I, ironically, find myself reading less and less, unless it is within my immediate field of research interest. As I began reading Scott Sauls's *Jesus Outside the Lines*, however, I knew I was encountering something truly extraordinary. Now that I've finished reading, this would be the very first book I'd recommend to *anyone* who wants to get beyond the incessant cultural and political strife—so prevalent in our time—which inexorably begets the erosion of genuine Christian faith. In fact, I would recommend this to my own child as the first cultural primer as a sojourner on his way to the City of God. *Tolle lege!*

**PAUL C. H. LIM**

Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, Tennessee

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**Scott Sauls**



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To Tim Keller: it is because of your leadership and vision that I am who I am as a minister.

To the members of Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville: you are family.

To Abby and Ellie: you are beautiful, special, and loved. Don't ever forget that.

To Patti: you are my best friend and the love of my life. Here's to another twenty years of dancing outside the lines.



# FOREWORD

I prefer life *inside* the lines.

Clean, straight, black and white. That's way simpler.

Who wants to live in the *gray*, anyway? Blurred lines breed chaos and confusion. All control feels lost. In the gray we are exposed, our vulnerability and uncertainties put on display. To risk existence in the middle ground requires humility, or more—being misunderstood.

But Christians are supposed to know what they think about everything, right? We are the ones tasked with—commissioned even—to go and tell everyone else what to believe, how to act, and whom to judge. Isn't that, at least in part, what it means to be a Christian?

Unfortunately, generations of Christians have grown to think so. But this perspective couldn't be further from the truth. That is, if the truth is Jesus. Deep down we know there's a better way, but we are unsure how to get there.

Enter Scott Sauls.

As a pastor, New Yorker, Southern gentleman, and caring mentor, Scott is an antidote to our dilemma. His experience spans both the intellectual and the practical. He's a breath of fresh air!



## JESUS OUTSIDE THE LINES

We need that kind of leadership. We each sense the disconnection, misunderstanding, and chaos going on within our churches and communities. Opinions are strong, and the stakes seem high. The public square we share is evolving at rapid speed, and we no longer know how to civilly dialogue when we disagree.

For some, the reaction is to recoil. They build walls, label enemies, and defend traditions. This makes things simple, black and white. But is that really how we ought to approach one another—and the neighbor God has called us to love?

Jesus doesn't call us to simple. He calls us into complexity. The human soul, psyche, mind, and emotions are complicated. And if he calls us to anything, it's to enter into the mess that is day-to-day life alongside broken people in the midst of chaotic circumstances.

Scott walks us through some of the most divisive issues of our day. With a kind, loving, and gentle tone, he carefully aids our thinking while respecting our intellect. He gives us just enough of his own delicate influence to discern a way forward, yet he puts that choice in our hands.

Scott's desire to help *real* people engage *real* problems and find *real* answers catapults this book to the top of the stack for anyone wanting to understand how to better engage a divided world. His call for unity and understanding is not to be mistaken as compromise; rather, it is pastoral encouragement to live faithfully even when it feels we are at odds with others.

By the end of this book, I'm sure you'll feel the way I do about Scott. You will have met a caring and thoughtful leader, one who carries a burden of sincere concern for our world while being a trustworthy and reliable guide. He's not interested in stirring up unhelpful, provocative arguments and banter. But rather, Scott presses into the gray—which is outside the lines, knowing it is only there that we find the heart of Jesus.

*Gabe Lyons*

Founder of Q and author of *The Next Christians*

Introduction

# JESUS OUTSIDE THE LINES

*You can safely assume that you've created God in your own image  
when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.*

— ANNE LAMOTT

I decided to write this book because I am tired.

Tired of taking sides, that is.

Are you?

Are you tired of gossip and negative stereotypes? Are you tired of labeling and being labeled? Are you tired of political caricatures and talk-show outrage? Are you tired of opinions being presented as facts? Are you tired of critiques and condemnations that forgo listening and relationships? Are you tired of indignant blog posts and tweets and Facebook posts that take a stand against everyone but that persuade no one? Are you tired of divisions over silly and secondary things? Are you tired of racism, classism, sexism, generationalism, nationalism, denominationalism, doctrinalism, and all other *isms* that stem from the *ism* that feeds them all: elitism? Are you tired of the glass being half empty? Are you tired of the endless quest to find something to be mad about? Are you tired of us against God, us against them, and us against ourselves?

Are you tired of the ways that you, too, have succumbed to the against-ness of it all?

Political cartoonist and *New York Times* op-ed writer Tim

Kreider, who concedes that his job requires him to be “professionally furious,” describes a modern epidemic that he calls “outrage porn”:

So many letters to the editor and comments on the Internet have this . . . tone of thrilled vindication: these are people who have been vigilantly on the lookout for something to be offended by, and found it. . . . Obviously, some part of us loves feeling 1) right and 2) wronged. But outrage is like a lot of other things that feel good but, over time, devour us from the inside out. Except it’s even more insidious than most vices because we don’t even consciously acknowledge that it’s a pleasure. We prefer to think of it as a disagreeable but fundamentally healthy reaction to negative stimuli, like pain or nausea, rather than admit that it’s a shameful kick we eagerly indulge again and again. . . . [It is] outrage porn, selected specifically to pander to our impulse to judge and punish, to get us off on righteous indignation.<sup>1</sup>

The commitment to feeling 1) right and 2) wronged is a fairly common phenomenon. But is this a fruitful way for Christians in particular to engage in public conversations about the issues of the day? Jesus taught us a different way.

Tim Keller writes, “Tolerance isn’t about not having beliefs. It’s about how your beliefs lead you to treat people who disagree with you.”<sup>2</sup> This is where biblical Christianity is unparalleled in its beauty and distinctiveness. I am not talking about distorted belief systems that pretend to be Christianity, yet are not. I am talking about the true, pure, undefiled, unfiltered, and altogether biblical and beautiful system of belief—the one that leads people to trust God and have hope for humanity, to visit

## JESUS OUTSIDE THE LINES

orphans and widows in their afflictions, to love neighbors who are near and who are in need, and to extend kindness to enemies:

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus did not merely speak these words as an edict from on high. He *became* these words. “God *shows* his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”<sup>4</sup> While we were running from him, while we were passively resisting him, while we were actively opposing him, while we were his enemies, Christ—compelled by love—died in our stead.

Do we need any more reason than this to extend kindness to those who don’t see things as we do? Having received such grace, Christians have a compelling reason to be remarkably gracious, inviting, and endearing toward others, including and especially those who disagree with us. Are we known by what we are for instead of what we are against? Are we less concerned about defending our rights—for Jesus laid down his rights—and more concerned

When the grace of Jesus sinks in, we will be among the least offended and most loving people in the world.

about joining Jesus in his mission of loving people, places, and things to life?

When the grace of Jesus sinks in, we will be among the least offended and most loving people in the world.

### **Jesus Outside the Lines of My Christian Tribe**

Jesus loves the element of surprise. He loves to meet us in places where we least expect him—in places that contradict our assumptions and sensibilities, in places where we are least likely to be looking for him. One of these places is in the lives of other believers with whom we disagree on important, but less-than-essential beliefs.

I am told that the theologian R. C. Sproul once gave a talk at our church—Christ Presbyterian in Nashville, Tennessee—on how God and people come into relationship with one another. On this particular subject, Dr. Sproul is known to emphasize the sovereign, electing grace of God. Others, like Billy Graham, are known to emphasize human free will. While Dr. Sproul would say we choose God only because God first chose us, Dr. Graham would say that God chose us based on his prior knowledge that we would someday choose him. This is an intramural debate between believers. It is an important issue, but it is not a determining factor in anyone's eternal destiny.

During the question-and-answer time after Dr. Sproul's talk, someone asked him if he believed he would see Billy Graham in heaven, to which he replied, "No, I don't believe I will see Billy Graham in heaven." Of course, there was a collective gasp. But then he continued, "Billy Graham will be so close to the throne of God, and I will be so far away from the throne of God, that I will be lucky to even get a glimpse of him!"

R. C. Sproul demonstrated that sincere believers can disagree on certain matters, sometimes quite strongly, and still maintain

great respect and affection for one another. What's more, they can find glimpses of Jesus in one another—glimpses that may not be as evident within the confines of their own theological tribes.

The longest recorded prayer we have from Jesus is his famous High Priestly Prayer,<sup>5</sup> in which he asks God that his wildly diverse communion of followers would be united as one. It is no coincidence that the apostle Paul begins most of his letters with the two-part salutation “grace to you”—the standard Greek greeting—and “peace to you”—the standard Jewish greeting. It is no coincidence that he insists that Jews and Greeks, slaves and free people, men and women live together *as one* through Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> All three of these pairings represented the deepest forms of relational hostility to the first-century reader. Jews looked down their noses at Greeks, and Greeks despised Jews. Men were dismissive toward women, and women were embittered toward men. Free people saw slaves as subhuman, and slaves resented free people. Paul calls for an end to such divisions because Christians are in many ways a band of opposites who, over time, grow to love one another through the centering, unifying love of Jesus.

But there is more to unity than the cooling down of hostility. Christians from differing perspectives can *learn* and *mature* as they listen humbly and carefully to one another. I treasure the fact that some of my closest “pastor friends” are from traditions other than my own. Besides being excellent company, these friends are meaningful and necessary for my own development as a minister and as a follower of Jesus.

What's more, I don't know where I would be without the influence of others who see certain nonessentials differently

The more we move outside the lines of our own traditions and cultures, the more we will also be moving toward Jesus.

than I do. I need the wisdom, reasoning, and apologetics of C. S. Lewis, though some of his theological beliefs are different from mine. I need the preaching and charisma of Charles Spurgeon, though his view of baptism is different from mine. I need the resurrection vision of N. T. Wright and the theology of Jonathan Edwards, though their views on church government are different from mine. I need the passion and prophetic courage of Martin Luther King Jr., the cultural intelligence of Soong-Chan Rah, and the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, though their ethnicities are different from mine. I need the justice impulse and communal passion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, though his nationality is different from mine. I need the spiritual thirst and love drive of Brennan Manning and the prophetic wit of G. K. Chesterton, though both are Roman Catholics and I am a Protestant. I need the hymns and personal holiness of John and Charles Wesley, though some of their doctrinal distinctives are different from mine. I need the glorious weakness of Joni Eareckson Tada, the spirituality of Marva Dawn, the trusting perseverance of Elisabeth Elliot, the long-suffering spirit of Amy Carmichael, the transparency of Rebekah Lyons, the thankfulness of Ann Voskamp, the Kingdom vision of Amy Sherman, and the integrity of Patti Sauls, though their gender is different from mine.

As St. Augustine reputedly said, “In nonessentials, liberty.” To this we might add, “In nonessentials, open-minded receptivity.” We Christians must allow ourselves to be shaped by other believers. The more we move outside the lines of our own traditions and cultures, the more we will also be moving toward Jesus.

## **Jesus Outside the Lines of Christianity**

Jesus makes the audacious claim that he *has* the truth and that he *is* the truth. He declares that anyone who knows and receives

the truth is going to be set free. But he goes further than this. In his most famous sermon, Jesus says that any claim or idea—no matter how sincere—that contradicts him or his teaching is false and, if not forsaken, will lead to disastrous consequences:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus draws a line in the sand. Whether or not our hearts and minds resonate with, respond to, and surrender to the message of his life, death, burial, and resurrection will determine eternal outcomes for us. Our movement toward him in faith or away from him in unbelief, our saying to him, “Thy will be done” or “My will be done,” will indicate whether he has graciously drawn us into his Kingdom or justly left us outside of it. We are either part of his family or not part of his family.

In this sense, as far as Jesus is concerned, everyone will ultimately “take a side.”

Yet Jesus gave so much of his time, attention, and love to people who did not side with him. A journey through the Gospels shows that he was especially tender toward people who did not believe in him or follow him.

What does this mean for us today? What does this mean for how we Christians, in particular, should relate to those who do *not* believe as we do?



## JESUS OUTSIDE THE LINES

This excerpt from an essay written by a chaplain at Harvard addresses these questions:

The divide between Christians and atheists is deep. . . . I'm dedicated to bridging that divide—to working with . . . atheists, Christians, and people of all different beliefs and backgrounds on building a more cooperative world. We have a lot of work to do. . . . My hope is that these tips can help foster better dialogue between Christians and atheists and that, together, we can work to see a world in which people are able to have honest, challenging, and loving conversations across lines of difference.<sup>8</sup>

The Harvard chaplain's name is Chris Stedman. He is an atheist.

Is it possible for those who believe and those who do not believe in Jesus to disagree with each other on sensitive subjects and still maintain meaningful and even loving friendships with

What matters more to us—that we successfully put others in their place, or that we are known to love well?

one another? As an atheist, Chris Stedman believes it is possible. As a follower of Jesus, I believe it is not only possible but that it is an essential part of Christian life.

In theory this sounds reasonable, but in real life it is difficult. As Dostoyevsky writes in *The Brothers Karamazov*, love in practice is a dreadful thing compared to the love in dreams. In real life, disagreeing about sensitive subjects can reveal pain, sorrow, and complexity. It is with this truth in mind that Christians must navigate the complex and often paradoxical waters of conviction and love.

Is it possible to profoundly disagree with someone and love that person deeply at the same time? Is it possible to hold deep

convictions and simultaneously embrace those who reject your deep convictions?

Jesus tells us the answer is yes. And he *shows* us the answer is yes.

Are you familiar with Jesus' encounter with the rich young man? Jesus told the man to sell all of his possessions, give to the poor, and then follow him. The man then turned away from Jesus because he had great wealth. There are two incredibly significant details in this account that we may overlook. First, Jesus looked at the man *and loved him*. Second, the man walked away from Jesus feeling *sad*. Not judged. Not ticked off. Sad. He walked away in the tension of paradox—enslaved by his affluence, yet sensing that by walking away from Jesus he might be forfeiting an even greater, more life-giving form of wealth.<sup>9</sup>

What matters more to us—that we successfully put others in their place, or that we are known to love well? That we win culture wars with carefully constructed arguments and political power plays, or that we win hearts with humility, truth, and love? God have mercy on us if we do not love well because all that matters to us is being right and winning arguments. Truth and love can go together. Truth and love *must* go together.

Peter wrote these words into a climate in which Christians were routinely criticized, marginalized, and persecuted:

In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.<sup>10</sup>

Slanderers and persecutors put to shame . . . *through gentleness and respect.*

I believe that Dan Cathy has been listening to Peter. Dan Cathy, the president of Chick-fil-A, is a Christian who was thrust into the public eye after answering a reporter's question about his beliefs regarding gay marriage. Cathy, wanting to be true to

Truth and love can go together. Truth and love *must* go together.

his understanding of what Scripture says about the issue, stated simply that he believes marriage is designed for a man and a woman. What followed was an organized and highly publicized protest against him, his commitment to the Bible, and his business, which was boycotted by many.

In response to the boycott, scores of Cathy's supporters rallied for "Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day," buying millions of chicken sandwiches in a show of solidarity—a protest against the protest.

*Dan Cathy did not personally affirm or join in the protest against the protest.*

Instead, he quietly reached out to one of his strongest critics, gay activist Shane Windmeyer, who eventually shared these words in an essay that he submitted to the *Huffington Post*:

It is not often that people with deeply held and completely opposing viewpoints actually risk sitting down and listening to one another. We see this failure to listen and learn in our government, in our communities and in our own families. Dan Cathy and I would, together, try to do better than each of us had experienced before.

Never once did Dan or anyone from Chick-fil-A ask for Campus Pride to stop protesting Chick-fil-A. On the contrary, Dan listened intently to our concerns and . . . [he] sought first to understand, not to be understood. . . . Dan and I shared respectful, enduring communication and built trust. His demeanor has always been one of

kindness and openness. . . . Dan expressed regret and genuine sadness when he heard of people being treated unkindly in the name of Chick-fil-A—but he offered no apologies for his genuine beliefs about marriage.<sup>11</sup>

Deep disagreement and no apologies for what he believes.  
Love, respect, listening, and friendship.  
At the same time.

### **A Way Forward for Those Who Are Tired of Taking Sides**

Are you looking for a way forward in which more bridges are built and fewer are burned? Do you want to express your faith in ways that move beyond stereotypes and that are coherent, beautiful, and true? Do you want to be known for the people, places, and things that you are *for* instead of the people, places, and things that you are against? Do you want to overcome the tension of wanting to be true to your beliefs and engage the culture? Are you ready to move away from polarizing conversations and toward Jesus and your neighbor?

This is our journey.

It's a journey that Jesus invites us to embark upon.

It's a journey outside the lines.





**PART ONE**

**JESUS**

**OUTSIDE THE LINES**

**OF MY**

**CHRISTIAN TRIBE**



## Chapter One

# RED STATE OR BLUE STATE?

*I met those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election, and advised them, 1. To vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy: 2. To speak no evil of the person they voted against: and, 3. To take care their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side.*

—JOHN WESLEY

SOMETIMES A SERMON CAN BE A POLARIZING THING. Once I was preaching to a crowd of New Yorkers about how Christians should respond to the problem of poverty. I will never forget two e-mails that I received the following week, both in reference to the same sermon. The writer of the first e-mail, among other things, accused me of being a right-wing extremist. The writer of the second e-mail said that he was certain that I must be a left-wing Marxist.

Time for a career change? I hope not.

There are few subjects that cause people to become more heated and opinionated than the subject of politics. Yet in the public discourse, the most heated and opinionated people seem to get nowhere with their heated opinions. During the 2012 presidential election, a friend of mine posted the following on his Facebook page:

Dear person passionately pushing your political agenda on Facebook,



## JESUS OUTSIDE THE LINES

Congratulations! You have convinced me to change my vote. Thank you for helping me see the light.

Appreciatively yours,

No one.

When I received the two critical e-mails in response to my sermon about poverty, I shared them with Tim Keller, who at the time was my boss and mentor. Tim recommended that I seek to learn what I could from the experience, but not to worry too much about the negative feedback, because it could actually be a good sign. For us preachers, Tim said, the longer it takes people to figure out where we stand on politics, in all likelihood the more faithfully we are preaching Jesus.

As is the case with every paradox associated with Christianity, there is a *both/and* and a *neither/nor* component to Christianity as it relates to political loyalties. Unless a human system is fully centered on God (no human system is), Jesus will have things to affirm and things to critique about it. The political left and the political right are no exception.

That helps me. I hope it will help all of us, especially those who are tired of the rancor and caricature that so often accompany political discussions.

### **The Bible and Government**

The first thing I want to say about government is that God is in favor of it. This should encourage anyone with a career in public service. Presidents, members of Congress, governors, mayors, aldermen and alderwomen, as well as police officers, military personnel, park and school district employees, and other public servants play an important role in God's plan to renew the world.

The Bible identifies three institutions that God has estab-

lished to resist decay in society and promote its flourishing. These are the nuclear family, the church, and the government. The focus of this chapter is to consider specifically what the Bible says about government.

We know that Jesus paid taxes and encouraged his disciples to do the same.<sup>1</sup> To those living in Rome, whose government was not always friendly to Christians, the apostle Paul encouraged submission to the governing authorities, who are “ministers of God” and to whom taxes, respect, and honor are owed. Peter likewise tells believers that part of their service to the common good is to fear God and honor the Roman emperor.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible also highlights God-fearing men and women who served in public office. Debra served as judge over Israel, Joseph served as prime minister for the Egyptian pharaoh, Daniel served in the court of Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon, and Nehemiah was a trusted official for the Persian king Artaxerxes. Jesus gave high praise to a Roman soldier for his exemplary faith.<sup>3</sup> These and other examples confirm that government, whether in theocratic ancient Israel or secular Egypt, Babylon, Persia, or Rome, has always been part of God’s plan.

As is the case with every paradox associated with Christianity, there is a *both/and* and a *neither/nor* component to Christianity as it relates to political loyalties.

### **Whose Side Is Jesus On?**

When it comes to politics, the Bible gives us no reason to believe that Jesus would side completely with one political viewpoint over another. Rather, when it comes to kings and kingdoms, *Jesus sides with himself.*

## JESUS OUTSIDE THE LINES

The following encounter between Joshua, an Israelite military commander headed into battle, and the angel of the Lord is instructive:

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?” And the commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.<sup>4</sup>

*Lord, are you for us or for our adversaries?* “No, I’m not,” he replies.

The question, then, is not whether Jesus is on our side but whether we are on his. This is the appropriate question not only for politics and government but also every other concern.

It may surprise us to know that there was political diversity among Jesus’ disciples. Included in the Twelve are Simon, a Zealot, and Matthew, a tax collector. This is significant because Zealots worked *against* the government, while tax collectors worked *for* the government. Interestingly, Matthew the tax collector emphasizes this diversity more than any of the other Gospel writers.<sup>5</sup> Despite their opposing viewpoints, Matthew and Simon were friends, and Matthew wanted us to know this.

Matthew’s emphasis on a tax collector and a Zealot living in community suggests a hierarchy of loyalties, especially for Christians. Our loyalty to Jesus and his Kingdom must always

exceed our loyalty to an earthly agenda, whether political or otherwise. We should feel “at home” with people who share our faith but not our politics even more than we do with people who share our politics but not our faith. If this is not our experience, then we very well may be rendering to Caesar what belongs to God.

People from varying political persuasions can experience unity under a single, first allegiance to Jesus the King, who on the cross removed and even “killed” the hostility between people on the far left, people on the far right, and people everywhere in between.<sup>6</sup> Wherever the reign of Jesus is felt, differences are embraced and even celebrated as believers move toward one another in unity and peace.

Now let’s consider two different ways to look at politics. First, we will consider the world’s politics. Then we will look at the politics of God’s Kingdom.

## **The World’s Politics**

In the eighteenth chapter of John’s Gospel, we see a clash between two governors: Pontius Pilate, the governor of Rome, and Jesus Christ, the governor of the universe.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus is brought to Pilate by an angry mob. The mob charges Jesus with being an enemy of the state and a threat to Caesar’s preeminence. Pilate, wanting to hear the account directly from Jesus, asks him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus responds, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.” Not sensing Jesus to be a threat, Pilate says dismissively to the crowd, “I find no guilt in him.”<sup>8</sup> But then he makes a concession according to Jewish custom to release one man for them at the Passover. The crowd pressures Pilate to release Barabbas, a known murderer and insurrectionist, and to crucify

Jesus in Barabbas's place. Wanting to please the crowds, Pilate accommodates. Jesus, the innocent man, gets the death penalty. Barabbas, the guilty man, goes free. Modern politics can also work this way.

The goal of politics is to get people to support a particular vision for the world and to conduct their lives according to that vision. In pursuit of this goal, politicians today often use the same strategies that Jesus' accusers and Pilate employed: misuse of power and manipulation of truth.

### *The Misuse of Power*

The world's politics rely heavily on power. Pilate finds himself caught between a rock and a hard place: he believes that Jesus is innocent; he also knows that Barabbas is guilty. Yet the calculating governor is desperate to please the crowds. As he considers the accusations against Jesus, he goes back and forth between his private chamber and then back out to the crowds. Though he knows who is innocent and who is not, he can't decide whom to crucify and whom to set free.

What is happening here? We can assume that Pilate is taking the temperature of the crowd. He is assessing potential outcomes, discerning which course of action will be best for his own approval rating as well as the preservation of his own stature. His conscience makes him reluctant to crucify Jesus, yet he wants the favor of the crowd. But in worldly politics, when conscience and the crowd are at odds with one another, the crowd always wins. When the crowd always wins, bad people can go free and good people suffer.

I love the animated movie *Shrek* for many reasons. There is so much about the human experience that the film gets right. One such example is the pitiful little ruler of the land, Lord Farquaad.

Farquaad is a single man. The one thing he feels is missing from his kingdom is the lovely princess Fiona, who has

long been locked up in a castle far away, guarded by a deadly, fire-breathing dragon. There have been many failed attempts to rescue Fiona; many would-be rescuers have lost their lives.

Farquaad gathers his bravest knights together for a competition. The knights are placed inside an arena to duel against each other until only one of them is left standing. The prevailing knight will have the “honor” of going out on Lord Farquaad’s behalf to rescue Fiona. Farquaad, himself a coward, offers the following “inspirational” speech to the knights before they turn against each other in the arena:

Brave knights, you are the best and brightest in all the land. Today one of you shall prove himself. That champion shall have the honor—no, no—the privilege to go forth and rescue the lovely Princess Fiona from the fiery keep of the dragon. If for any reason the winner is unsuccessful, the first runner-up will take his place and so on and so forth. Some of you may die, but it’s a sacrifice I am willing to make.<sup>9</sup>

The world’s politics. *Your* hopes, desires, ambitions, good name—and, if necessary, your life—are worth sacrificing in order to protect and advance *my* agenda. And I will use my power, the authority of my office, to ensure that this happens. *Some of you may die. But it’s a sacrifice I am willing to make.* The ends justify the means.

### ***Manipulation of the Truth***

The world’s politics are also laced with manipulation of the truth, also known as “spin.” We see this in the exchange between Pilate and the accusing crowds. When Pilate asks Jesus if he is king of the Jews, Pilate is not interested in spiritual matters. He wants the answer to one question: *Is this man a threat to my*

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*power?* Is he an enemy of Caesar, and therefore also my enemy? What is the size of his following? What is his agenda? What kind of momentum is there behind his movement?

Pilate would not be asking any of these questions about Jesus had the crowds not spun Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God to mean that Jesus was an enemy of the state. In reality this is a silly and baseless accusation, because Christ's teaching directs his followers to honor those in authority in every way possible. This being true, to the degree that Christians follow the teachings of Jesus, they will actually be perceived as the most *refreshing and cooperative* citizens of any earthly kingdom.

Pilate's agenda was of no concern to Jesus' accusers, because Jesus' growing influence threatened the status quo for them as well. In order to keep Jesus at bay, they created a false narrative about him and went public with it. Eventually it got him killed.

How about us? Are we also prone to exaggerate, spin, and tell half-truths to protect (or usurp) the status quo? How easy it can be to get pulled in to the politics of spin. Some of us have become so used to these tactics and so numb to them that we—yes, even we who claim to be people of truth—have become willing participants in the spin.

*On this side of the aisle is our candidate, the answer to all of the world's problems. She can do no wrong. On that side of the aisle is their candidate, the reason for all of the world's problems. He can do no right.*

Are such partisan caricatures and political absolutes a Christian practice, or are they decidedly un-Christian? What do you think?

Leaning toward a certain party is one thing (Matthew did it, Simon did it, and Jesus allowed it), but it is important to see that a partisan spirit can actually run against the Spirit of God. If there ever was a partisan crowd in the Bible, it was the crowd that pressured Pilate to crucify Jesus instead of Barabbas.

Barabbas, a true criminal, went free while Jesus, an innocent man, was executed after having his impeccable character assassinated. This is the essence of partisanship. Partisans inflate the best features of their party while inflating the worst features, real or contrived, of the other party. They ignore the weaknesses of their own party while dismissing the other party's strengths.

I have good friends on both sides of the political aisle. I trust them. Many of them—on both sides—have a strong commitment to their faith. Because of this I grow perplexed when Christian men and women willingly participate in spin—ready, willing, and armed to follow the world in telling half-truths to promote their candidates, while telling more half-truths to demonize their opponents. Have we forgotten that a half-truth is the equivalent of a full lie? What's more, political spin is polarizing even within the community of faith.

## **A Generational Shift**

As a pastor I have been struck by what appears to be a strong reaction among the millennial generation (young adults between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five) toward the faith of their baby boomer parents. Some surveys suggest that millennials are either leaving the church or adopting an altogether different expression of Christianity than the one in which they were raised. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, reporter Brian Hiatt asked Marcus Mumford whether he still considers himself a Christian. Mumford, a pastor's son and a famous millennial (he is lead singer of the band Mumford & Sons), had this to say:

I don't really like [the word *Christian*]. It comes with so much baggage. So, no, I wouldn't call myself a Christian. I think the word just conjures up all these religious images that I don't really like. I have my



personal views about the person of Jesus and who he was. . . . I've kind of separated myself from the culture of Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

When those who feel a need to distance themselves from Christianity are asked why, Mumford and other millennials cite several reasons. At the top of the list is weariness over the association of right-wing politics with mainstream Christianity. The “culture of Christianity” that Mumford and others want no part of tends to trace directly back to this association. In the realm of politics, millennials have culture-war fatigue.

With this has come a pendulum swing. Wearing by their parents' right-leaning politics, many millennials have shifted toward the political left. There are good things about this phenomenon. Younger, more progressive-minded believers are bringing a renewed zeal for biblical values such as service, care for the poor, inclusion of people on the margins, ethnic and cultural diversity, and other forms of social justice into their communities. What one wonders, however, is how a generational shift to the political left will play out in the long run. Do millennials risk repeating their parents' errors, the only difference being a co-opting of blue-state sensibilities into faith instead of red-state ones? Will their children sense an imbalance in them as well? Only time will tell.

### **The Politics of God's Kingdom**

Please don't hear me saying that it is wrong for a Christian to support one political party over another. Christians have liberty in things that are nonessential, including politics; that's the point I am trying to make here. The political left and the political right both have good things to say, and both have their problems as well. It can be damaging to think otherwise.

For example, during the 1992 presidential elections a friend of mine told me about an awkward moment in his Bible study. One of the group members expressed excitement because that Sunday, she had seen a bumper sticker promoting the “other party” in the church’s parking lot. She was excited because, to her, this was an indication that non-Christians had come to visit. Imagine the awkwardness when another member of the group chimed in, “Um . . . that’s my bumper sticker that you saw.”

Can we talk? If a Zealot and a tax collector share a common faith that transcends opposing political loyalties, then left-leaning and right-leaning believers must do the same. It is wrong to question someone’s faith because they don’t vote like you do. Yes, *wrong*.

***It’s Not about Which Side of the Aisle***

More recently, a member of our church asked me if I could help him find a Bible study group filled with people he doesn’t agree with politically. This really encouraged me, because it shows that there are indeed some Christians who value the growth and sharpening that can come from diversity, including political diversity. This is a man who, unlike those whose maturing process is stunted by blind partisan loyalty, is on a fast track toward greater maturity. As he opens himself to learn from the perspective of others, he also moves toward Jesus, who is neither conservative nor liberal, yet is also both.

Jesus is neither conservative nor liberal, yet he is also both.

In many ways, Jesus is more conservative than the far right. For instance, he says that “not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”<sup>11</sup> He warns that anyone who adds to or takes away from the words of his Book will not share in the tree of life or the Holy City. He emphasizes the

importance of evangelism and conversion and said that unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.<sup>12</sup> These are all hallmarks of today's conservative Christians.

Jesus is also in many ways more liberal than the far left. In saying repeatedly, "You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you . . .," he upends the long-held traditions of his time, establishing a new vision for the world for anyone who would receive it.<sup>13</sup> In this, Jesus is quite subversive with respect to the cultural norms of his time. He says that traditional Jews and modern Gentiles should not separate, but should stay in community together, and that serving the poor is central to his mission.<sup>14</sup> That's all very progressive of him.

### ***How Do We Know We Are on God's Side?***

The politics of God's Kingdom are different from the world's politics. Kingdom politics reject the world's methods of mis-using power and manipulating the truth. What does it look like for Christians to live out Jesus' Kingdom vision in our daily lives? It looks like taking care of widows and orphans, advocating for the poor, improving economies, paying taxes, honoring those in authority, loving our neighbors, pursuing excellence at work, and blessing those who persecute us. When this happens, kings, presidents, governors, mayors, law enforcement officers, park officials, and other public servants will take notice. Those in authority will begin to see Christians as an asset to society. They will recognize and appreciate that Christians, as citizens first and foremost of God's Kingdom, value leaving the world in better shape than we found it. Consider these words from C. S. Lewis:

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. . . . The conversion of

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the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.<sup>15</sup>

Let's consider for a moment what history does in fact tell us.

### CHRISTIANITY HAS ALWAYS THRIVED MOST AS A LIFE-GIVING MINORITY, NOT A POLITICAL MAJORITY

Some believe that putting Christians in office and other places of power is the key to transforming the world. "If only there were more people in power who followed Jesus," the reasoning goes, "*that* would be the game changer that would finally make the world what God intends it to be." While it is indeed a very good thing for Christians to serve in public office, neither the Bible nor history supports the idea that holding positions of power is *the key* to bringing God's Kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. On this point, Jesus' own resistance to earthly power is telling. At the peak of his popularity, the people wanted him to be king. But he had a different agenda: "Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself."<sup>16</sup>

Why would Jesus resist earthly power? Why would even a "politician" after God's own heart, King David, tell us not to trust in chariots, horses, or princes?<sup>17</sup> Because Christianity always flourishes most as a life-giving minority, not as a powerful majority. It is through subversive, countercultural acts of love, justice, and service for the common good that Christianity has always gained the most ground.

For example, Christians in ancient Rome faced severe opposition and persecution from the state. Yet in this climate, believers

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had “favor with all the people”<sup>18</sup> because of the refreshing way in which they loved *all* their neighbors. Following many failed attempts to exterminate Christians from Rome, the emperor Julian wrote a letter to his friend Arsacius. In the letter, Julian conceded that the more he tried to destroy Christians, the more their movement grew. Said the emperor, “The impious Galileans [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well.”<sup>19</sup>

When did Christianity begin to falter in Rome? It began when a later emperor, Constantine, sought to impose Christianity on all of Rome as the state religion. The results were disastrous. Rather than becoming more like the city of God, Rome went into spiritual decline, and the salt of early Christianity eventually lost its savor. The same can be said of many European countries. When those in power made Christianity the state religion, the church began its decline toward irrelevance. More recently, the so-called Moral Majority sought to bring “Christian values” to American society through political activism and “taking a stand” for what they believe. Unfortunately for them, this strategy has had a reverse effect.

### CHRISTIANITY EMBRACES BOTH CONSERVATIVE AND PROGRESSIVE VALUES

The Kingdom of Jesus does not advance through spin, political maneuvering, manipulation of power, or “taking a stand” for what we believe (do we ever see Jesus, or for that matter Paul or any of the apostles, taking a stand against secular society or government?). Rather, the Kingdom of Jesus advances through subversive acts of love—acts that flow from conservative *and* progressive values. This is the beauty of the Christian movement. It embraces the very best of both points of view, while pushing back on the flaws, shortcomings, and injustices inherent in both.

How does this work?

By the third century, in spite of a government that stood

against religious freedom (except for the freedom to worship Caesar), the social fabric of Rome had been transformed for the better. Believers in Christ were the chief contributors to this transformation. Here are a few examples:

First, Christians led the way in the movement for women's equality. At that time there were double standards in Rome with respect to gender. A woman was expected to be faithful to her husband, while a man could have multiple mistresses and wives. Unmarried and childless women were ostracized. If a woman's husband died, she had two years to find a new husband before the state would withdraw support and she would likely starve. Christians took up the cause of women, giving them prominent places of honor in the church, taking care of widows as if they were family, and insisting that men be faithful to their wives. In spite of prevailing cultural values, a Christian man was expected to be either single or a "one-woman man," the husband of one wife. The virtue of monogamous sexuality within marriage—a conservative value today—was at play. But so was the progressive virtue of equality—men could no longer treat women as inferior.

The Kingdom of Jesus advances through subversive acts of love—acts that flow from conservative *and* progressive values.

Second, infanticide was prominent in early Rome. There was no prevailing ethic of life except that certain lives were expendable. Consider this excerpt from a letter by a man named Hilarion to his wife, Alis, who was expecting a child. Hilarion was away on business and sent these instructions about the child in Alis's womb:

Do not worry if when all others return I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech of you to take care of the

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little child, and, as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. If—good luck to you!—you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out. You told Aphrodisias to tell me: “Do not forget me.” How can I forget you? I beg you therefore not to worry.<sup>20</sup>

It is stunning how upbeat he is toward his wife on the one hand, and how heartless he is toward the child on the other . . . if it is a girl, that is. “*If it is a girl, throw it out.*” Sadly, this was all too common in Rome. Christians, however, became known for taking up the cause of orphans (girls, children of other races or with special needs—it didn’t matter) by welcoming them into their families and raising them to adulthood. Here we have the conservative virtue of protecting the unborn plus the progressive virtues of championing female equality and social justice.

Third, as in Hitler’s Germany, the poor in Rome were coldly viewed as “useless eaters,” a drain on society. But in Christian communities the poor were treated with dignity and honor. There was a spirit of compassion and generosity among Christians, which manifested in the sharing of wealth to narrow the income gap—a progressive value. But generosity was voluntary, not forced—a conservative value. I once heard someone say that though the early Christians were monogamous with their bodies, they were promiscuous with their wallets.

My friend Erik Lokkesmoe says that it is the job of Christians to help certain parts of government become unnecessary. Of course he does not mean there should be no government at all, just less need for government in those areas that Scripture entrusts to the church’s care. God gave us government to restrain evil and uphold the peace in society. He gave us the church to (among other things) champion the cause of the weak, heal the sick, feed the hungry, and show hospitality to people on the margins. With his statement, Erik calls the church to a renewed

## RED STATE OR BLUE STATE?

vision of being a countercultural movement that works for the good of all.

The Kingdom of God advances on earth as it is in heaven when the people of God, loved and kept by Jesus, assume a public faith that includes, but is certainly not limited to, government. Public faith enriches the world not by grasping for earthly power, but through self-donation. This is how Jesus transformed Jerusalem. This is how Christianity transformed Rome. This is how Christianity can transform any society, including our own.

“Seek first the kingdom of God . . . , and all these things will be added to you.”<sup>21</sup>