


LIMITS ON THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE

“Pilate said to [Jesus], ‘You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?’ Jesus answered him, ‘You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.’”¹

overnment is divinely charged to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good [see **1 PETER 2:14**]. There is certainly room to discuss the ramifications of such a broad mandate or to argue how such a mandate should be implemented. Nevertheless, it remains true that beyond this divine directive, if government wishes more power over the individual, it must arrogate to itself authority that has not been conferred by the Creator. For instance, governments have no right to define morality or to coerce the conscience. That governments do assume such authority ensures continual tension between state and church.

There would be no disagreement between students of biblical morality and political science if there was agreement to a fixed standard to be applied for determining what is moral or ethical. However, with the advent of modern evolutionary judicial thought standards of morality and ethics have grown pliable; consequently, moral and ethical standards are in a constant state of flux. Increasingly, parliaments and legislatures seek to regulate thought, doing so through redefining both moral and ethical behaviour. As a result, conscientious Christians experience considerable tension as they endeavour to discern the boundaries of governmental authority that God has set.

Clearly, modern governments do seek to control thought and to redefine morality. However, in such efforts, they intrude into realms over which they have no authority. Definitions of morality and ethics are the domain of religion and not that of the state. Ultimately, the morality of a particular society will be what is permitted by the citizenry, usually resulting either from silence of or through the consistent teaching of the churches.

Increasingly, churches in the present, liberal-minded, world are under assault. It is expected that Christians will tolerate every form of wickedness, silently acquiescing to practises that are utterly repugnant to godly convictions and antithetical to righteousness. Faith, according to the contemporary mindset, is a private affair that must not be allowed to colour any other aspect of life. Churches are virtually commanded to submit their faith and practise to the approval of government bureaucrats or to the judiciary.

Modern governments have become notorious in their attempt to regulate every facet of life, even intruding into the sacred right of the individual to hold private opinions. Society seems to have concluded during the past several decades that the state must protect the feelings of all people—save for conscientious Christians. We are taught that we must not make any statement that may hurt the feelings of any individual that considers himself or herself to be a racial minority, or who happens to represent a “minority” religion, or who seeks to normalise moral deviance. The state has therefore become the protector of feelings, a champion appointed to avenge hurt feelings.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

From earliest days, Baptists have championed freedom of worship, espousing the ideal of a free church in a free state. Baptists tenaciously hold to the doctrine of liberty of conscience. We conscientiously seek to be good citizens—praying for those in authority, obeying all laws that do not violate Scriptural injunctions, and honouring those who are charged to direct affairs of government. However, Baptists have always insisted that we have a higher law that must prevail in every aspect of life. We received this command from the Founder of our Faith—Jesus, the Son of God.

From earliest days, those holding Baptist principles, have endured jail, have been tortured and suffered confiscation of their goods, rather than permit their conscience to be violated. Knowledgeable Baptists exemplify through their lives the reality of the words of George W. Truett, long-serving pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. On May 16, 1920, Dr. Truett stated in an address delivered on the steps of the National Capital in Washington, D.C., “A Baptist would rise at midnight to plead for absolute religious liberty for his Catholic neighbour, and for his Jewish neighbour, and for everybody else.”² And a Baptist will just as quickly plead for religious liberty for his Muslim neighbour or for her atheist neighbour.

When He was betrayed, the Master was delivered to Pilate with the demand from religious leaders that He be crucified. Arraigned before the Roman legate, the Master maintained silence. The governor, on the other hand, blustered and sought to intimidate. Ultimately, his feeble threat was met with firm rebuke. Contained within Jesus’ admonishment is encouragement and instruction worthy of our thoughtful consideration. Join me, therefore, in a study of the exchange between Jesus and Pilate.

TENSIONS BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE — “Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you.” These are the words Pilate used in an attempt to compel Jesus to respond to his queries. The Roman procurator readily assumed authority, but failed to accept the responsibility that attends that same authority.

Few scenes in the Gospel accounts are more dramatic than the one before us now. Jesus stands accused of sedition and blasphemy; He stands before the governor of Judea, a Roman functionary appointed by Caesar. Pilate imagines that he sits in judgement of the man known to him as Jesus of Nazareth; but it is not the Son of God that is examined—it is the Roman legate that is on trial. Pilate did not even know that he was being tested, but as surely as smoke rises from the fire, he was tried and found wanting.

The religious leaders that delivered Jesus to Pilate insisted that He was a threat to continued Roman rule. Pilate initially attempted to ignore their demands, but their insistence compelled him to conduct at least a cursory examination. “Are you the King of the Jews,” Pilate demanded [JOHN 18:33]? To that question, Jesus asserted that He was indeed a King, but that His “Kingdom is not from the world” [JOHN 18:36].

Pilate sought to demonstrate his power by having Jesus flogged. Scurrilous vituperation by the soldiers lent additional weight to Pilate’s orders. Even this exaggerated cruelty was insufficient to appease the bloodlust of the religious leaders, however. Only crucifixion would sate their appetite for blood, and Pilate grew fearful. In JOHN 19:8, we read “Pilate ... was even more afraid.” Ill at ease at first, the procurator grew still more alarmed; the prisoner’s calm demeanour unnerved the ruler.

² George W. Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty,”
http://www.mainstreambaptists.org/mob/truett_sermon.htm, accessed 27 June 2011

Pilate desperately tried to find a reason to release the man now in his custody. “Where are you from,” he demanded? Scripture says that “Jesus gave him no answer” [JOHN 19:9]. With this, Pilate attempted intimidation. In order to escape his dilemma Pilate must either coerce the prisoner or grovel to gain His assistance in freeing Him. Thus, Pilate said to Him, “Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you” [JOHN 19:10]? Indeed, Pilate had authority either to dismiss a charge that was not against the Roman government, or to prosecute that charge. Whatever choice he made, he was nevertheless responsible to do what was right.

There seems always to have existed a disquieting tendency for governments, through their representatives, to assume authority they were never given, to usurp responsibility even over people’s thoughts and ideas. Perhaps this intrusion grows out of governmental regulation of conduct—some of which is undoubtedly legitimate, though much of such regulation borders on what can only be classified as intrusive and unnecessary.

As mentioned in the opening words of this particular message, government is charged “to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” [1 PETER 2:14]. Within that mandate, censure of certain activities will be necessary. Murder is wrong and must be punished. Theft is wrong and must be punished. Vandalism and libel are wrong, and those who commit such wrongs must be held accountable. To fail to do so is to invite vigilantism, as individuals within society mete out their own punishment of evildoers, which actions could assuredly lead to anarchy.

However, legislators have a way of multiplying laws and regulations; and government tends to exert ever-greater efforts to regulate behaviour. Few of us would argue that speed laws or traffic direction laws are overly intrusive; but it is without question that the basis for mandatory seatbelt laws and helmet laws for bicycles has less to do with punishing evil than it has to do with mitigating the social costs absorbed by our socialised medical system when unrestrained drivers are injured or when helmetless motorcyclists are thrown from their bikes. The latter laws may be sensible to obey, and they may even be reasonable, but they are impossible to support as necessary extensions of the divine mandate given to government.

Perhaps those particular laws *are* justifiable in your mind; but one must question how laws that regulate to whom a farmer may sell his crop serve as praise for doing good. Likewise, it is difficult to justify a law that censures preaching which condemns behaviour that is clearly denounced in the Bible. Unless the legislature accroaches to itself the ability to define good and evil, such laws must be seen as illicit and even as unrighteous. However, attempting to redefine what is good and what is evil opens those providing the new definition to the disapproval of Scripture. Isaiah warns,

“Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!”

[ISAIAH 5:20]

Throughout the United States, for instance, reports multiply detailing the creation of laws requiring Catholic institutions to provide contraceptive services and “morning after” pills to female employees, of laws attempting to compel religious hospitals to perform abortions and to provide abortion training, and of the use of anti-racketeering laws to intimidate right-to-life demonstrators through imposing harsh punishments for opposing abortion services.³

A few years ago in Massachusetts we witnessed an egregious intrusion of the state into the precincts of church doctrine. After 103 years of providing adoption services to the city of Boston, Catholic Charities were no longer permitted to serve the community. Since 1977 Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Boston had provided adoption services that primarily placed children with severe emotional and physical needs on behalf of the state. During the 1980s and 90s, 720 children were placed in permanent homes through adoption. The agency provided pre-adoptive training, birth parent counselling, home studies, infant adoption, special needs adoption and post placement assessment.

Those services were provided, for the most part, at little expense to the state. In fiscal year 2005, Catholic Charities received approximately \$1 million in reimbursements from the Massachusetts Department of Social Services for its adoption-related work, but the charity provided an additional \$36 million from its own funds for a broad variety of services including the adoptions.⁴

Catholic Charities of Boston were obeying Vatican doctrine that sees placement of children in the homes of same-sex couples as “gravely immoral” when they decided that they could not conscientiously permit adoption by same-sex couples. As result of their decision to obey church doctrine, the state no longer permitted them to perform their adoptive service. Despite the fact that over 31% of the special needs children adopted in Massachusetts were adopted through Catholic Charities, the state felt it had a compelling interest to force the agency to jettison Catholic doctrine in favour of a new doctrine written by legislators at the behest of sodomite and lesbian activists. It is difficult to see this as anything other than an attempt by power-mad politicians and governmental functionaries to bring the Catholic Church to heel.

A similar conflict arose when the City of San Francisco sought to bully Catholic Charities into openly agreeing that they would place children into the homes of homosexual couples despite the violation of Catholic doctrine. The charity, citing papal doctrine, held that placing children into such environments was potentially harmful to the children and that such action would not be conducive to their full human development. Though the religious charity endeavoured to find a resolution to the impasse, the city council maintained its right to compel compliance with their demands. Ultimately, those demands led to eliminating all adoption activities for the agency.⁵

³ John Leo, “Issue at stake in gay-adoption fracas is religious freedom,” March 26, 2006, http://townhall.com/columnists/johnleo/2006/03/26/issue_at_stake_in_gay-adoption_fracas_is_religious_freedom, accessed 7 July 2011

⁴ “Boston’s Catholic Charities to stop adoption service over same-sex law,” March 10, 2006, http://www.catholic.org/national/national_story.php?id=19017, accessed 7 July 2011

⁵ Debra Saunders, “Charity begins at home, ends at city hall,” March 27, 2006, <http://jewishworldreview.com/0306/saunders032706.phpe>, accessed 7 July 2011; Patricia Wen, “Calif. Charity ends full adoptions,” August 3, 2006, http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2006/08/03/calif_charity_ends_full_adoptions/, accessed 11 July 2011

A disturbing number of incidents in which regulatory bodies—primarily human rights tribunals—coerce the conscience of Christians have occurred in Canada. Christian schools have been forced to hire people whom they maintained were immoral, printers have been fined for refusing to print materials they found offensive, school teachers have been censured because they spoke out on their own time against same-sex marriage, Christian charities have been fined because they would not rent halls for celebrating same-sex marriages—and these are just a few of the incidents that have occurred in the western provinces of our nation. How shall we respond to such conflicts?

GOVERNMENT DOES HAVE DIVINE AUTHORITY TO RULE —Jesus affirms that government does have a measure of authority. Listen carefully to Jesus' response when He was questioned by Pilate. "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." Jesus acknowledged that God has granted authority to the state. Indeed, the state, in carrying out the mandate to punish what is evil and to praise what is good, has authority even to take the life of evildoers [e.g. **ROMANS 13:4**].

This is not simply application of Old Testament law—it is New Testament teaching. It is apparent from His words that Jesus recognised the legitimate authority of the state. Take note that according to Jesus' statement, all authority comes from God. The principle to enshrine in your mind is that governmental authority is derived from God; thus, the limits on the authority of the state are likewise defined by God.

Early in the American Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson included these stirring and insightful words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." The founders of the American union recognised that the Creator, God Himself, is the source of all authority and all power; they recognised that government was instituted to secure the unalienable rights with which the Creator has endowed all mankind.

As the Lord Jesus prepared to ascend into the Glory, He attested to the disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" [**MATTHEW 28:18**]. He alone can delegate authority. Government may arrogate authority to itself, but no government possesses authority except what is divinely granted.

Some of you are reading a version of the Bible that has Pilate saying that he has "power" to pardon and "power" to condemn. The translation I am using has him speak of his "authority." The difference in these two words points out one of the significant issues confronting the translator—that of accuracy or precision as they move from one language to another. Though not contradicting one another, these two words may convey a slightly different meaning depending upon our understanding of what is being said.

One word that is often translated "authority" or "power" is the Greek word *dynamis*, which speaks of the ability to perform a task or perhaps to refer to an absence of hindrance. We derive our English words "dynamite" and "dynamic" from this Greek word. It may be of interest to note that this is the word Paul uses in **ROMANS 1:16** as he asserts that "the Gospel ... is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

Another word that may be translated "authority" or "power," is the word *kratos*, which refers to the naked "rule of power." The "rule of power" can be legitimate, or it can be illegitimate, as is the case when the Bible speaks of the devil whose "power of death" [**HEBREWS 2:14**] will one day be removed. *Kratos* forms the suffix of our English words "democracy" and "aristocracy."

If Jesus had used either *dynamis* or *kratos* when responding to Pilate's claim of authority over Him, He would have meant to convey nothing more than that all power for rule comes from God, in the same manner that all life comes from Him. However, Jesus used an entirely different word when He stood trial before the governor. Jesus responded to Pilate, using the word *exousia*, which specifically refers to "legitimate authority." Thus, Jesus acknowledged not only that authority in the sense of might are given by God, but that human government *per se* is divinely authorised; and thus, human government exercises a rule that must be recognised. In this, Jesus anticipates what the Spirit of God will later inspire both Peter and Paul to write [e.g. **ROMANS 13:1 ff.**; **1 PETER 2: 13 ff.**].

Jesus did not merely separate life into two spheres of authority—Caesar's and God's; His statement brings God and Caesar into relationship to one another. Government has no authority intrinsic to itself; rather God delegates governmental authority. Consequently, there must always be inherent in any discussion of governmental authority consideration of responsibility and the awareness of sin. Government authority is divinely given, but it also carries responsibility to God!

We Christians must strive to be good citizens. We must work to be subject to governing authorities, to be careful to obey all laws, and especially to pray for those in authority. We should be known as people who obey the speed limit, act courteously toward civil servants whether they are pleasant or surly, pay our taxes honestly, and seek to maintain peace and good order both through our actions and through our attitudes.

With a respectful rebuke, Jesus reminded Pilate that ultimately his authority did not devolve from the empire at all, but from God. It is not as if the work of the state enjoys divine approval; but rather, the representative of the state was put on notice. Pilate was compelled to choose to follow either the truth revealed by Christ, truth that finds its origin in God, or to choose the world and its devices. When the state renounces its submission to God, it is immediately darkened and controlled by the god of this world. Government, divorced from the obligation to praise those who do good and to punish those who do evil, becomes a force for evil whether it intends to do so or not.

The Roman governor offered the Jewish people a choice, "Which will you have, Jesus or Barabbas?" The Jewish people, however, responded by offering the governor a different choice, "Which will you have, Christ or Caesar?" Pilate had little interest in the death of Jesus; but at that moment he was confronted with a choice. Would his real power derive from Caesar or God? Pilate chose the former and thus became the willing accomplice of evil, delivering Jesus over to be executed against law and conscience.

It should be obvious that God is indeed at work within the work of the state [**ROMANS 13:1**]. Jesus spoke as He did, not in order to provide an endorsement of God-given rights for government; rather, His words serve to check the authority of government. The Master sought to make Pilate alert to the limitations of the power he thought he possessed. Government, too, is accountable to God and responsible to perform God's work in the world. The authority of the state is limited by the will of God.

GOD PLACES LIMITS ON THE AUTHORITY OF GOVERNMENT — Are there no limits to the authority of the state? Suppose that the government of the day is corrupt? Well might the conscientious believer ask, "Is a law that is passed and implemented by that government to be obeyed, even if it is transparently unjust or blatantly ill conceived?" The answer is that there are indeed limits on the authority of the state.

The second part of Jesus' statement to Pilate must be considered at this time. Standing before the Roman legate, the Master made a startling assertion. Jesus cautioned, "He who delivered me over to you has the greater sin." Thus, it is not simply the "right to rule" that government has received, but it is "authority." Authority, granted by another, of necessity involves responsibility to that other. The one who delivered Jesus to Pilate—likely referring either to Annas or to Caiaphas the High Priest—was guilty of the "greater sin." Pilate was guilty of sin, but his was not the "greater sin." The authority of Pilate was bounded by the moral nature of God who delegated authority.

The state cannot substitute for the church, no more than the flag can substitute for the cross, and no more than citizenship substitutes for discipleship. Once the state coerces the spiritual, it crosses a boundary and becomes destructive and antithetical to righteousness. We cannot permit government workers to make religious decisions for us. We cannot permit government to convert others to its version of moral or ethical beliefs. We cannot tolerate a situation where parents are no longer considered the proper source of religious instruction for young children, and where government agents decide when parents are wrong regarding religion. Neither can we permit government to be able to tax citizens to pay for encouraging religious beliefs not shared by all those being taxed.

The authority of the state cannot extend beyond the moral law; the state must not have authority over human conscience. Certainly, the state cannot violate God's Law. In a powerful polemic against accepting the *status quo* when the mundane is evil, Doctor Martin Luther King reminded ministers, who were condemning him, of the limits of the law. Included in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is found these truths. "I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that 'an unjust law is no law at all.'

"Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: 'An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law.' Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust."⁶

The Word of God places limits on obedience to human authority in the area of **CHRISTIAN CONDUCT AND MORALS. No government has the right to command Christians to perform an immoral or non-Christian act.** The government of China may seek to compel parents to abort any child conceived after the birth of a first child, but a Christian cannot conscientiously agree with such an evil act. Western governments may eventually seek to compel ministers of religion to perform same-sex marriages, but no conscientious servant of Christ can willingly agree to such an action. Governments may pass laws that seek to dictate who may or may not be supported by the gifts of Christian people, but churches that seek to honour the One whom they call "Master," cannot permit themselves to be compelled to accept people that are living openly in defiance of God's moral law to become members of their congregation; and neither can a true church permit itself to be compelled to hire such individuals at the direction of the state.

⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," © The Estate of Martin Luther King, Jr., http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/liberation_curriculum/pdfs/letterfrombirmingham_www.pdf, accessed 12 July 2011

The Bible restricts the authority of government over the **PREACHING** of the Word. **No government has the right to dictate to a church the doctrines held and taught.**

Christians have a duty imposed by the Master to declare the Good News and to instruct disciples to “observe all” that Jesus “commanded” [see MATTHEW 28:19, 20]. Though preaching the Word of God may be threatened with being categorised as “hate speech,” the preacher holding forth God’s Holy Word is under a higher authority than that of the state, and the one who proclaims God’s Word is appointed to speak the truth in love. Indeed, we live in a day in which preachers have already been charged with hate speech for declaring the moral tenets of the Word of God. Both through legislatures and through quasi-official regulatory bodies, governmental apparatchiks appear increasingly prepared to redesign, to enervate or even to curtail the teaching of Christ the Lord.

The message of Christ calls all people to repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Love compels us to tell everyone that Christ died because of our sin and that He rose for our justification. Undoubtedly that message is offensive to the natural man; Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, atheists and nominal Christians may well take umbrage at this message. However, followers of the Risen Christ have received a charge to speak the truth in love. We are compelled by our faith in Him whom we call Master to declare that all people are sinful, and to offer life through faith in the Son of God.

This Word compels us to condemn racism and discrimination of all kinds, to warn against disrespect toward the elderly and to insist that abortion is nothing less than murder of the unborn. Though the message condemning sin may be resented by many, we have no other choice as Christians but obedience to the command of Christ the Lord. The Word of God demands that we warn all people that wickedness shall be judged, even as we encourage Christians to live godly and holy lives.

With loving compassion, we who follow the Way of Truth are compelled to warn any who engage in homosexual behaviour or in lesbian relationships that their conduct will bring divine judgement. This ministry of compassion will be conducted even as we are compelled to resist a growing Christophobia that holds contemporary governments in a stranglehold and seeks to silence our warnings. Nevertheless, our faith impels us lovingly to warn those who are lukewarm and casual about the Faith of Christ the Lord that each one must give an answer to Him who has all authority to judge. Our Faith demands that we resist accommodation with error for the sake of a momentary truce. Our Faith compels us to resist wickedness, even though we know the message we bring is resented and despite potential suffering because of that message.

An example of what may happen when we are obedient to Christ is provided in this Word. Shortly after the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were speaking constantly of the Risen Son of God. Peter and John were obedient to the Spirit of God and a lame man was gloriously healed. His excitement at being able to walk was so great that he attracted many people as he leaped about and shouted. The Apostles, seizing the opportunity, spoke of the power of Jesus not only to heal, but also to give life [ACTS 3:1-26].

Haled before the Sanhedrin, Peter and John were warned not to speak in the Name of Jesus [ACTS 4:18]. This was nothing less than a naked attempt to restrict the message they preached, neutering that message so it would not be in conflict with the views of morality and ethics promoted by the Jewish leaders. “Peter and John answered [the Sanhedrin], ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard’” [ACTS 4:19, 20].

After receiving further threats, the Apostles were released. They continued to preach and teach the message of life, leading to their incarceration for the crime of preaching the Gospel of the Prince of Peace. Hauled before that august body once again, the high priest angrily accused, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us” [ACTS 5:28]. Peter settled the issue of who is Lord for all Christians for all time with this bold declaration, “We must obey God rather than men” [ACTS 5:29]. This declaration must serve as the motivating force for each believer in the Risen Son of God, “We must obey God rather than men.”

Though the members of the Sanhedrin was prepared to kill them had not Gamaliel counselled a more temperate course, the Apostles stated their convictions and were willing to accept even the imposition of an unjust sentence. This account from the early days of the Faith teaches us that Christians are to give preference to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, neither may they cease to declare the mind of God, even should civic authorities demand that they temper their message to accommodate changing morality or bruised feelings. Christians must be prepared to suffer the consequences that may arise because they live a holy life and because they speak the truth in love. Though the consequences arising from righteousness may include loss of property, imprisonment or death, for the Christian, truth must prevail and Christ must reign supreme over life.

For too long, churches have preached a faith that demands nothing of adherents though yet offering incredible rewards. The rewards of godliness are real enough—life, peace with God, hope, joy, the forgiveness of sin and acceptance into the Family of God. However, the faith that saves is a transforming faith that gives sufficient strength to those who believe that they will stand firm in the face of every threat. Even within Baptist ranks are found far too many that preach a strange new gospel that says “Repent—after a fashion, and believe—such as it were, or be damned in a measure.”

The message I deliver today is a call for determined righteousness to prevail. The life to which I am calling you is not an easy life—it demands that we make every effort to be good, to be godly, to be holy. The Christian life demands our best for His glory. We must speak the truth in love, holding governments accountable when they endeavour to redefine morality and to coerce the church into the mould of the dying world to which they belong. Together with the Master, we must so live and so speak that we always remind politicians and bureaucrats that they have no authority except that which is given from above. The Faith of Christ the Lord is a manly religion that seeks loving firmness in living out the Faith we have received. This Faith is not all sweetness and light—it requires wisdom at all times and firmness on occasion as we exalt our Master.

Would you be a Christian? I do not mean would you simply attempt to fulfil some nebulous cultural expectation or endeavour to find an easy way to avoid divine condemnation. If you will be a true Christian, you must know that you will be challenged and you must be prepared to resist governmental intrusion into the sacred precincts of your own freedom. It will mean that you are responsible to speak the truth in love, preparing yourself gently, though firmly, to rebuke evil.

If you will be a Christian, you must come to the Son of God, who though tried before Pontius Pilate and delivered over to be crucified, conquered death and rose from the dead. You must believe that He died because of your sin and rose for your justification, just as Scripture declares.

The Word of God instructs all who will be saved, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” That passage concludes with the divine promise to all, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

For all who listen and who are outside the Faith, we invite you to receive the gift of life in Christ the Lord through believing His message of life. Come join us in this bold, life-changing Faith that causes tyrants to tremble and gives freedom and life to all who accept Him. For all that are called by the Name of Christ, the call of the message is to stand firm, to not give way to evil, to understand your responsibility in a fallen world and to be the best citizen possible through living a godly and a holy life to the praise of Christ’s glory. Live as free men to the praise of His glory. Amen.