



"The reason the church is failing to effectively invade the world is because the world has invaded the church."

—Anonymous

**17-May-02**

## **Above the Fray**

Dr. James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, recently gave a speech at the National Religious Broadcasters' annual convention in Nashville, Tennessee. In the last half of his message, he spurred the members of his audience to use their political influence to stem and reverse the declining cultural tide of this nation. He cited such luminaries as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Francis Schaeffer, and Martin Luther King, Jr., as examples of Christians making a difference when society turned evil and/or immoral. Here is a typical paragraph:

John the Baptist said the same thing [called evil by its name] to Herod, a notoriously bloody tyrant. He said, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife" ([Mark 6:18](#), NIV). And his head was severed and placed on a platter. I suppose many Christians through the ages have been unwilling to address the moral issues when their lives were in danger. But what is new is this effort among some evangelical leaders to justify their silence in response to wickedness. In my view, theirs is an impossible case to make.

He is right on one score and wrong on another. We should not be silent when immorality becomes the norm in our culture. We should be seeking to protect our and other's children from the onslaught of liberal and perverse ideas and programs in the schools, in the media, and on the streets. We should not stand idly by while our values are trashed in the name of freedom of expression and separation of church and state.

However, where Dr. Dobson errs is the location of our fight. He believes Christians should become involved in government, in lobbying, in politics. He believes we should use the free and democratic process with which America has been blessed to take the battle to those who would destroy our Judeo-Christian ethic and culture. However, the apostle Paul has a different take:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of [God](#), that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. . . . [P]rayer always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of [the gospel](#), for which I am an ambassador. . . . ([Ephesians 6:12-13](#), 18-20)

One can search the New Testament and find no calls from [Jesus](#) or the apostles to get involved in government to affect change in society. In fact, they tell us that [Satan](#) is the [god of this world](#) ([II Corinthians 4:4](#)) and that we should come out of [the world](#) ([Revelation 18:4](#)), not [love](#) it ([I John 2:15](#)) or even be friends with it ([James 4:4](#))! Jesus charges the apostles to preach the good news of the coming [Kingdom of God](#): "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" ([Mark 16:15](#)). He also says "that [repentance](#) and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations" ([Luke 24:47](#)), but makes no mention of a great crusade to change society.

The "church" tried that in the fourth century, hooking its wagon to the Roman Empire under Constantine, and notice what happened: Once it became part of the government, it became the worst abuser of people, law, and morality throughout the Dark and Middle Ages! During the time of the Reformation, Protestants came to power in many European countries—and promptly followed the Catholic example of abuse and persecution of "heretics" and "nonconformists." Would today's "moral majority" fare any better?

No, the focus of the gospel is personal and individual, not societal or national. Even in the apostles' day, mass conversions were rare and worthy of note ([Acts 2:41](#)). Certainly, none will occur in these times because of government edict or political action. Each person must hear the words of salvation, respond, repent, and live righteously. Real societal change begins with the individual and expands to his family, his friends and neighbors, and beyond as the result of the witness of godly living ([Acts 1:8](#); [I Peter 2:12](#); [Isaiah 43:10](#)).

Besides, the time of the end is characterized by its immorality and rejection of God ([II Timothy 3:1-5](#), 13; [Matthew 24:4-13](#); [Revelation 9:20-21](#); etc.). Though we cannot throw up our hands in defeat, our efforts to turn society back to Christian morality appear doomed to fail. It will take "a strong hand from someplace" to strike this present evil world with a rod of iron and enforce righteousness and [peace](#) on stubborn and rebellious mankind ([Isaiah 11:1-5](#); [63:1-6](#); [66:15-16](#); [Daniel 2:44](#); [Joel 2:1-10](#); [3:9-17](#); [Zephaniah 1:14-18](#); [Zechariah 14:3](#), 12; Revelation 19; etc.).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Self-Government and Responsibility \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

A major distinguishing characteristic of mankind is his free moral agency,

presenting him with choices and the right to make decisions. We need free moral agency to be transformed into God's image. The volition to do right has to come from the core of our character or nature. Paradoxically, the way to maximum freedom is to yield to God's way of doing things. Unless one has the Spirit of God, he cannot exercise the necessary internal control to be subject to the government of God. Even though the church is not the government of God (John 18:36; I Corinthians 15:50), we need to respect the ministry as well as lay members, being subject to one another (I Corinthians 11:1). The operation of God's government absolutely depends upon each person governing himself, never going beyond the parameters of the authority God has given him.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Rebuilding the Wall](#)**

by Staff

A wall is a defense against undesirable forces gaining entrance to what is inside it. Spiritually, we need walls to keep Satan's world out of our lives.

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