

AMERICAN FAMILY ASSOCIATION PRESENTS:  
**A TIME TO  
SPEAK**

Study Guide

The relationship of first century Christians to civil authorities was far different than Christians in the U.S. today. Under the oppressive heel of the Roman Empire, freedoms were few and the threats of government oppression were very real. First century believers also had to contend with periodic culture-based outbreaks of persecution as well.

In the light of these vast differences in circumstances, how can the Bible possibly give us insight on how we conduct ourselves today?

The answer is that we must take very general principles and extrapolate them to the far different world in which we now live.

## **THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**

### **JOHN 8:12**

“Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.’”

1. Who is described as being “the Light of the world”?
2. When people follow Jesus, He said they won’t do what?
3. What do you think this means?
4. In contrast, they will do what?
5. What do you think this means?

### **JOHN 3:19-21**

“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

1. When the Light came into the world, how did people respond?
2. In vs. 19, why does it say they responded this way?
3. What does the Light do to men’s deeds (vs. 20)?

### **MATTHEW 5:13-16**

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. <sup>14</sup>You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; <sup>15</sup>nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. <sup>16</sup>Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

1. In vs. 15, what metaphor does Jesus use to describe the role of the Christian while on earth? What do you think He meant by this?
2. What word is used to describe the failure of the Christian to live up to this calling?
3. In the metaphorical sense, what fate awaits such failed Christians?
4. In vs. 14, Jesus uses two additional metaphors to describe what Christians are like. What are they? What do you think He meant by these metaphors?
5. What does Jesus say a light or a lamp does? What is its purpose?
6. In vs. 16, what real world application does Jesus give to the phrase “let your light shine before men”?

7. How does such activity reflect on God?

### **EZEKIEL 3:18-19**

“When I say to the wicked, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.  
<sup>19</sup>Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself.”

1. In vs. 18, what is God’s message to the wicked?
2. Who has the responsibility of taking that message to them? Do you think that responsibility rests with prophets alone or the wider body of Christ?
3. In terms of wickedness or iniquity, do you think God is referring only to personal sins or do you think societal/cultural sins are included?
4. If the wicked are not warned, they perish in their sins and are held accountable for them. Whom else does God hold accountable?
5. If God’s people warn the wicked of their sin and they do not repent, are His people still held accountable?

**Conclusion:** The Christian in every age and in every political circumstance is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

### **Application questions:**

1. In difficult political situations – perhaps while living under a communist dictatorship like North Korea or Islamic state like Saudi Arabia – how can Christians still be salt and light?
2. In fairly easy political situations – obviously like living in the United States or other Western nations – what do you think being salt and light looks like? How might it differ from more difficult political situations?

# THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

## 2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. <sup>5</sup>We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ ...."

1. In this famous passage, Paul says the Christian fights battles in the power of God (vs. 4). What do we use these "divinely powerful" weapons to destroy?
2. In light of vs. 5, what 2 things might we understand to be the equivalent of these "fortresses"?
3. Paul says these false ideas are "raised up" against what?
4. What are Christians to do to these 2 things?
5. Do you think false ideas can only exist in a person's heart, or do they also exist in cultures? If the latter, do you think this means the Christian should fight against false ideas in society? How might this be done?
5. In terms of the contrast between weapons of flesh and divine weapons, do you think Paul means we should never use things in the physical world? That is, we should never bother protesting injustice or voting for laws or running for office, etc.?

## 1 TIMOTHY 3:15

"but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."

1. Paul explains that he is writing so that Timothy will know how to do what?
2. What are the 3 concepts that Paul uses to further define what he means by the "household of God"?

3. When he refers to “the truth,” to what do you think he is referring?

### **EPHESIANS 3:10**

“so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”

1. What is God making known?
2. What do you think Paul means by this?
3. Through what is He making this known?
4. To whom is He making it known?
5. In practical terms, how might the church express the wisdom of God in the world?

**Conclusion:** The truth of God applies to virtually every area of human life – from religion to raising families, from principles of government to education, from caring for the poor to protecting innocent human life.

### **Application questions:**

1. Whether or not a culture will listen, do you think Christians should proclaim the wisdom and truth of God in every arena?
2. Should Christians actively confront the ideas that are “raised up against the knowledge of God,” even if those ideas exist in the realm of politics?

## CIVIL GOVERNMENT

### MATTHEW 22:15-22

<sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. <sup>16</sup>And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. <sup>17</sup>Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?' <sup>18</sup>But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, 'Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup>Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.' And they brought Him a denarius. <sup>20</sup>And He said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' <sup>21</sup>They said to Him, 'Caesar's.' Then He said to them, 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.' <sup>22</sup>And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away."

1. This passage recounts a confrontation between the Pharisees and the Herodians and Jesus. The Pharisees were a religious sect of the time; the Herodians were probably a political sect, favoring the reign of King Herod, a civil representative of Rome. In vs. 15, what was the purpose of this alliance between the two groups?
2. The "poll-tax" was a very unpopular tax levied against the Jews. When the co-conspirators ask Jesus if such a tax was "lawful" (vs. 17), they meant the question in a religious, not political, sense. In other words, they were asking whether or not it was "lawful" for a Jew – who was subject to God – to be subject to Rome via the tax. What was the trap (vs. 15) they were trying to spring on Jesus?
3. Why did Jesus ask them "whose likeness and inscription" was on the coin?
4. When Jesus says, "[R]ender to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," to what was He referring? What does this statement mean?
5. When He says, "[render] to God the things that are God's," what is Jesus saying?

## **ROMANS 13:1-7**

“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. <sup>2</sup>Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. <sup>3</sup>For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; <sup>4</sup>for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. <sup>5</sup>Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. <sup>6</sup>For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. <sup>7</sup>Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”

1. This famous passage begins in vs. 1 with a very simple and clear statement. What is it?
2. What is the rationale behind this statement?
3. Are Christians allowed to reject government as a legitimate institution (vs. 2)? What happens when we do?
4. When government is functioning as God intended, what role does it play in human society (vv. 3-4)?
5. In vs. 7, Paul says we are to “render to all [government officials] what is due them,” and then he gives four examples of what he means. What are they? What do you think he means by “what is due them”?

## **1 PETER 2:13-17**

“<sup>13</sup>Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, <sup>14</sup>or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. <sup>15</sup>For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. <sup>16</sup>Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil,

but use it as bondslaves of God. <sup>17</sup>Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.”

1. The Apostle Peter says we are to submit to government “for the Lord’s sake.” What do you think he means by this?
2. In vs. 14, Peter says that government representatives are sent for two purposes. What are they?
3. In vs. 16, the apostle says that by submitting to the government and “doing right” (vs. 15), we are acting “as free men.” How can we be free when we are submitting?
4. What are the four responsibilities listed by Peter in vs. 17?

### **1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4**

“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, <sup>2</sup>for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. <sup>3</sup>This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

1. Paul urges in vs. 1 that Christians are to make four types of things “on behalf of all men.” What are they?
2. What responsibility do Christians have “for kings and all who are in authority”?
3. Why are believers to pray for government officials (vs. 2)? Why does Paul say this? How is the one related to the other?
4. How does God view such an attitude toward those in authority (vs. 3)?
5. In vs. 4, what does Paul say is God’s desire for all men?

**Conclusion:** The institution of government is created by God and plays a legitimate role in human societies. However, such governments do not always remain moored to God's plan for them. The Christian has responsibilities toward government as well.

### **Application questions:**

1. Government – or “Caesar” – has a realm of responsibility before God. In our nation, the responsibility for governance is granted to “We the People.” Doesn't this mean that good stewardship requires that Christians honor the institution of government by participating in it? Why or why not?

2. If Christians fail to live up to their responsibilities of self-governance, doesn't this put at risk the “tranquil and quiet life [lived] in all godliness and dignity” that Paul says we should desire?

## **INVOLVEMENT IN CULTURE**

### **JEREMIAH 29:4-7**

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, <sup>5</sup>Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. <sup>6</sup>Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. <sup>7</sup>Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.”

1. This passage refers to the historical period when the Jews were in captivity in a pagan culture. What sorts of real-world activities did God tell His people to involve themselves in?

2. In vs. 7, what does God tell His people to seek? Why?

3. What else were they to do for the city in which they lived?

4. What does this say about the connection between the people of God and the communities in which they live?

5. In applying this to the church, should Christians care what happens in their culture around them? Why or why not?

**Conclusion:** Christians should never think of themselves in isolation from the culture around them – even if that culture is pagan. When the society prospers, Christians prosper. When the society decays, Christians also suffer the consequences.

### **Application questions:**

1. While it was certainly different for Jews to live in pagan Babylon, our nation was founded on Judeo-Christian beliefs. If the Jews were called to seek the welfare of the cities in which they lived, shouldn't Christians at least do the same here? Why or why not?

2. Since living according to God's principles for ordered human existence profits people most, shouldn't Christians call a straying culture back to godly principles? Why or why not?

## **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

### **MATTHEW 5:10-12**

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup>Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

1. Jesus promised His people that they would be persecuted, but then He says they would be blessed if they are. Why do you think He said this?

2. In vs. 10 Jesus gives the cause of the persecution. What is it? Have you ever stood for righteousness in such a way that you were persecuted for it? Is it

possible that standing for righteousness could mean standing up in the public square for God's truth?

3. In vs. 11 Jesus says His disciples would be blessed when people do three things. What are they? Why does Jesus say that people would say and do these things to Christians?

4. Are Christians supposed to stop their witness to God's truth just because persecution is the result?

5. Jesus says in vs. 12 that Christians should "rejoice and be glad" when they are persecuted. Why?

6. What similarity is there between the persecuted Christian and "the prophets who were before you"?

### **ACTS 22:25-29**

"But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?'<sup>26</sup>When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, 'What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.'<sup>27</sup>The commander came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman?' And he said, 'Yes.'<sup>28</sup>The commander answered, 'I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.' And Paul said, 'But I was actually born a citizen.'<sup>29</sup>Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains."

1. In this passage, Paul is about to be persecuted for the faith. But in vs. 25, Paul asks the Roman centurion in charge a question. What was it?

2. Was it legal for a Roman citizen to be scourged without a trial?

3. Why do you think Paul does this? Does this contradict Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:12 that we should "rejoice and be glad" when we are persecuted?

4. What important principle does this establish about Christians insisting that their government does what is "lawful"?

**Conclusion:** There is a time for Christians to stand for what is “lawful” and there is a time for Christians to stand for righteousness.

**Application questions:**

1. Under what circumstances should Christians use current law to press for what is right?
2. When Christians can find no legal protections when they stand for righteousness, should they do so anyway? What can they expect to happen?

## **THE CHRISTIAN'S PROPHETIC CALL**

Throughout history Christians have often fought against injustice. For example, after a decades-long fight in the 19th century, the dedicated Christian William Wilberforce succeeded in seeing slavery banished throughout the British Empire. And in 20th century America, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led the fight against Jim Crow laws in the South. Do you think the involvement of these Christians in such matters was valid?

Here are a handful of Scriptures that deal with oppression and social justice. Discuss some of the ways in which Christians can be active in these areas, in order to make society a better place for each one of – and to answer the prayers of those who cry out to God for help.

### **PSALM 82:3-4**

“Vindicate the weak and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and destitute.  
<sup>4</sup>Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.”

### **PSALM 119:134**

“Redeem me from the oppression of man, that I may keep Your precepts.”

### **PSALM 146:7**

"Who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free."

**PROVERBS 24:11-12**

"Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold them back. <sup>12</sup>If you say, 'See, we did not know this,' does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?"

**ISAIAH 58:6**

"Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke?"