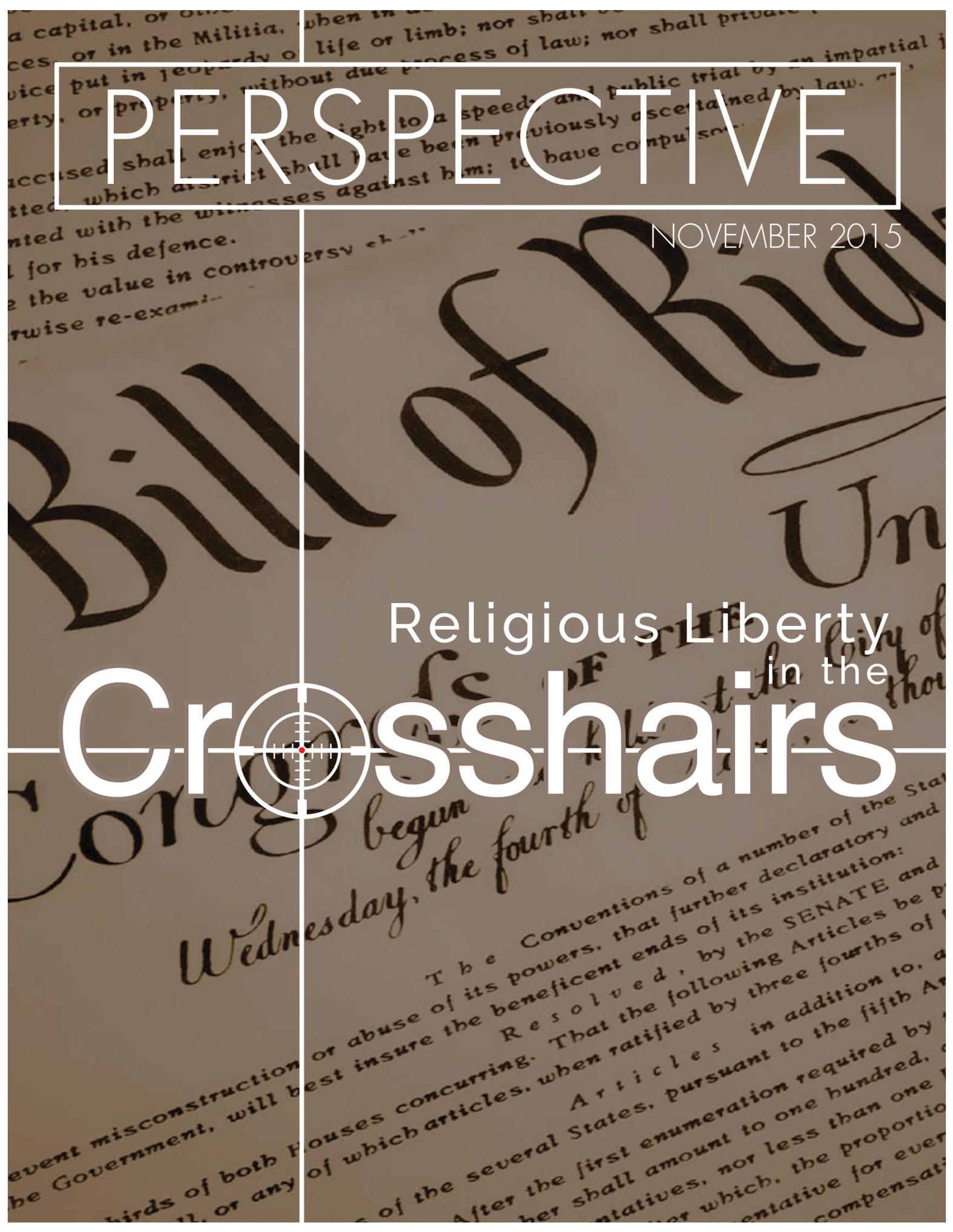


PERSPECTIVE

NOVEMBER 2015

Religious Liberty in the Crosshairs



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Religious Liberty in the Crosshairs

On July 18, 1955, Walt Disney welcomed visitors to the “Happiest Place On Earth.” It was Disneyland’s grand opening, the birth of the Magic Kingdom, and the asphalt was still soft. A young “Ronnie” Reagan, with his slicked-back hair, announced the festive event from a perch overlooking Main Street: “Those carriages which have lined up for the parade to follow are full of celebrities,” he said, “Walt Disney, Governor Knight, the mayor of Anaheim and other dignitaries are talking to the three chaplains recognizing the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths. And now, Walt Disney will step forward to read the dedication of Disneyland.”

After Disney’s brief remarks the Protestant chaplain, Lynn D. Pewter, addressed the crowd. He wanted every guest to know that Disneyland has a religious foundation:

I have known Walt Disney for many years, and have long been aware of the spiritual motivation in the heart of this man who has dreamed Disneyland into being. Let us join with him then in dedicating these wonder-filled acres to those things dear to his heart and ours, to understanding and good will among men, laughter for children, memories for the mature, and aspiration for young people everywhere. Beyond the creeds that would divide us, let us unite in a silent prayer that this and every worthy endeavor may prosper at God’s hand. Let us bow in prayer.

As those guests bowed together in prayer that summer day in 1955, America was a divided country. The year prior *Brown v. Board of Education* made segregation illegal, but it would take another nine years for the Civil Rights Act to become law, banning discrimination in employment and public accommodations. While thousands of children gathered to enjoy Mickey’s theme-park debut, countless African-Americans suffered under a yoke of prejudice and bigotry—the 50s were hardly the golden-years of our democracy.

“AND I DON’T CARE WHAT IT IS”

Yet in 1955, from Montgomery, Alabama to Anaheim, California, Americans shared an openness to religion, the conviction that faith in God is important to the nation’s

well being. This conviction fell far short of the gospel. Promoters of religion didn’t necessarily bother with orthodoxy—Pewter didn’t say anything explicitly Christian at the opening of Disneyland. Three years prior, in 1952, President-elect Eisenhower had promoted a similar religious ambiguity: “Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply-felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is. With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept, but it must be a religion where all men are created equal.”

The point isn’t that a gospel-centered faith saturated American life—far from it. We simply observe that for most Americans faith in God was valuable, a key ingredient to promoting a virtuous society. Americans shared a conviction that laws can’t make humanity moral. We agreed the government had no right to curtail religious expression and, more than that, we welcomed public displays of religious devotion as an appropriate pillar supporting America’s welfare. We believed religion held a prominent place in the public square.

This is not to say that any government should compel religion. Christians in general and Baptists in particular have argued long and hard that the government has no right to demand religious observance. Even after the adoption of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, Massachusetts taxed its citizens for the support of the Anglican clergy. Baptist Isaac Backus vehemently objected to this as the establishment of a state religion. Backus won the argument, and in 1833 the state amended its constitution to end this practice. Backus knew that genuine faith should not be forced on anyone.

Americans from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries joined in widespread agreement that religion is good for society. The Founding Fathers instilled the fledgling democracy with the notion that America will be best if its citizens are freed to practice their religion as they see fit. As ISIS today banishes and murders Christians in the Middle East, we must affirm the importance of advocating the freedom to publicly practice one’s faith. Describing the legacy left by the Founding Fathers, Purdue historian Frank Lambert maintains:

[T]hey ensured the free exchange of competing faiths without government support of or opposition to any faith. In the early twenty-first century, with religious fundamentalists around the world calling for the establishment of religious republics, Americans continue to enjoy religious

freedom in a pluralistic society, a society that is often contentious and even strident, but free.

Lambert penned those words in his 2003 work, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America*. Twelve years later, the place of religion in America has changed.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY UNDER ATTACK

Religious liberty in America cannot be taken for granted. In 2014, two private companies went all the way to the Supreme Court to argue it is unconstitutional for the federal government to require them to provide employee health care coverage that includes potentially abortive contraception. Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Specialties were forced to fight the very government that is supposed to be committed to religious liberty.

Barronelle Stutzman, the owner of Arlene's Flowers in Washington state, refused to arrange flowers for a same-sex wedding. Though she gladly sold flowers to her customer for years, she believed that creating floral arrangements specifically for his same-sex wedding would be giving approval to sin. As a result, Washington's attorney general sued Stutzman for sexual orientation discrimination under the Consumer Protection Act. She has appealed but failure to obey the State's demands may lead to the loss of her business and personal assets.

On April 3, 2015, *The New York Times* columnist, Frank Bruni, argued that participants in the religious freedom debate must be freed "from prejudices that they needn't cling to and can indeed jettison . . . rightly bowing to the enlightenments of modernity." He was referring to the Christian belief that homosexuality is a sin and, therefore, same-sex marriage is sinful. Though Bruni makes no claim to being a theologian, on the basis of the testimony of a few outliers to the evangelical faith, he asserts that the historic Christian position on sexuality is just that, "historic," and needs to change with the times. In other words, Christians need get on board the cultural train and jettison their religious baggage that leads them to say marriage is a life-long union between one man and woman.

A few months later the Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that each state must recognize same-sex marriages. In the majority opinion, Justice Kennedy made it clear he sees no constitutional protection for religious practice (how you live out your faith in public) merely for religious worship (how you live in private in your home or assembly). The difference between "practice" and "worship" could not be starker. In Algeria they have freedom to share the gospel in a church building, they do not have freedom to share the gospel on the street. The freedom to religious practice and the freedom to religious worship are not the same thing.

Two days after the Supreme Court decision, Mark Oppenheimer wrote in *Time Magazine* that churches which "dissent from settled public policy" on matters of sexuality should say goodbye to their non-profit status.

His opinion is that churches which have not jumped on the cultural train are not good for the culture.

This past summer, Melissa and Aaron Klein had to close their bakery, *Sweet Cakes by Melissa*, for refusing to use Melissa's artistic talents to specially decorate a cake for a same-sex wedding. Oregon's Bureau of Labor and Industry has ordered the couple to pay \$135,000 in damages for the "emotional suffering" inflicted by their "unlawful discrimination." The Klein's, who have already lost their business as a result of the lawsuit, have refused to pay, arguing they've not received due process.

Kentucky county clerk, Kim Davis, in September of this year refused to sign same-sex marriage licenses. She ignored a court order to affix her signature, was held in contempt by a judge, and jailed by U.S. marshals for five days. Though the judge could easily have accommodated her religious beliefs from the very beginning, he chose instead to refuse Davis's right to practice her religion.

LIMITS TO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

These examples illustrate that America has entered an age where religious liberty is under attack. How we respond is important. However, before addressing a response it is crucial to concede that there are and should be limits to religious liberty.

These examples illustrate that America has entered an age where religious liberty is under attack. How we respond is important.

In 1993, Congress nearly unanimously passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to ensure the protection of religious liberty. This Act, signed by President Clinton, came to mean that the federal government does not have the authority to violate a person's religious freedom. But there are restrictions or limits to the extent of this law. The government can burden an individual's conscience in a matter of religion if two conditions are met: first, if burdening the conscience is necessary for the "furtherance of a compelling government interest" and, second, if burdening the conscience is the least restrictive way to further this interest.

Clearly there are limits to the practice of religious liberty. For example, some Americans hold to the religious belief they should have more than one wife at a time—polygamy. However, state and federal governments are convinced, at least as of today, that polygamy works against the government's interest to protect the family. Therefore, the government chooses to burden the conscience of certain Americans for the general welfare of the state and country.

Religious liberty is not a license for anarchy. A stable society must have laws that benefit the nation as a whole. At times those laws may have to violate an individual's religious opinion. Local, state, and federal governments should prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, regardless of whatever religious justification might be used to defend such evil.

Those who would use religion to defend racism or polygamy should find their consciences overruled for the common good. But the fact that some wrongly use religion as an excuse for tyranny does not change the fact that religious liberty is a precious principle to protect.

TWELVE BASIC PRINCIPLES

In an article like this I can't begin to answer every question regarding how the church ought to respond to the attack on religious liberty. We are facing new, ethical challenges that will require time, study, and prayer to sort out. In the meantime, there are several timeless principles to keep in mind as we navigate a culture that finds religious liberty in the crosshairs.

1) Because God is good and sovereign, the victory of the church is not in doubt.

Let's not bemoan the current, cultural crisis. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church and neither will the Supreme Court, the Congress, or the Executive Branch. We know "all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28) so we must not lose heart. We can rest with full assurance in the final and ultimate victory of our King, Jesus Christ.

2) Scripture predicted everything the church is facing.

Let's not be surprised by the culture's indignation toward the church. We are to be joyful in the face of persecution because it forces us to look forward to a future reward (Matthew 5:12; 1 Peter 4:13). Jesus urged us to take heart during worldly trials because of his victory at Calvary (John 8:33). Paul taught us to pray "for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life" because he knew that there would arise kings and others in high positions who would set policies that deprive us of such lives. Knowing that Scripture promised suffering can help us prepare us for the day persecution arrives—be it in Mosul or Manhattan.

3) The state and the church are separate institutions with unique spheres of authority and responsibility.

Let's pray for each to fulfill the role God gave it. The state is to punish those who do wrong and, in so doing, protect those who seek to do right. The church is a visible community of saints, disciplining those within the church who refuse Christ's rule. Both institutions (the state and the church) are necessary for the common good. The state serves all by punishing those who promote terror instead of good (Romans 13:1-7). In other words, the state has the power to demand adherence to certain virtues that lead to peace. The church, on the other hand, has no such power.

The realm of the church is limited. Though the state serves all by *demanding* adherence to certain virtues, the church serves all by *encouraging* adherence to virtues that lead to peace. The church is to pray for and preach what it deems to be good and right. The state can do more: it can order what it deems to be good and right. Though the list of virtues embraced by the church and state will inevitably differ, there will be much overlap.

4) Local churches have primary allegiance to Christ, not the state.

Let's not flinch from fidelity to Jesus Christ. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to follow the Babylonian decree to worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar, and they agreed to face the civil punishment (Daniel 3:17-18). Jesus taught his disciples to obey the state, but not at the expense of obeying God (Luke 20:25). Wherever the state mandates disobedience to Christ, the Christian must choose Christ. Christians are warned not only against committing sinful acts, but giving approval to those who embrace such actions (Romans 1:32). Allegiance to Christ may be costly, but it is non-negotiable in Christian discipleship.

5) Institutions (family, state, church) not individuals are the fundamental building-blocks of society.

Let's respect the importance of community. Sometimes people critique Christians for holding to such strong opinions about the family. It's important to remember that the family plays a crucial and foundational role in every society. The family is the first social unit known to humanity. We might even say that the state and the church are clusters of families seeking to live together (state) and worship together (church).

Scripture addresses each of these institutions and each is very important. The better they function the more human flourishing we can expect to see. We live in an increasingly individualistic age where a person's personal desires trump community. Therefore, it's more important than ever to be thinking not only about what's good for me, but what's good for the institutions I'm a part of.

6) At times the state can and must trump an individual's conscience.

Let's accept that in a pluralistic society (that is, a society with people embracing different and often competing religious views), citizens will have to engage in the messy process of defining the common good—what is best for the welfare of the nation. An appeal to personal conscience should not be a license to lawlessness. Consciences, even religiously-informed ones, may be wrong and may need to be corrected or, to use legal language, "burdened," for the sake of the common good.

7) The state has no right to formulate the faith and practice of the church.

Let's confess that Christ, not the state, is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). God has revealed both a doctrine and a way of life that every Christian is called to embrace. At the highest level and in the broadest terms this means living for the glory of God.

The rubber meets the road when an individual believer has to disagree and even disobey a government ordinance if it forces the believer to reject Christ's claim on his or her life. In fact, when the government issues a decree forcing a Christian to disobey Christ, the government is effectively writing the doctrine of the church. It has no right to do this. Though a government has the power to ignore the believer's conscience (for example, Nebuchadnezzar's demand for idol worship), might does not make right.

8) Christian principles have public policy implications.

Let's remember that every social issue has a religious dimension. What we think about God and humanity and sin and redemption will affect our approach to legislation. This is another way of saying our worldview affects our approach to public policy. If you believe, for example, that a human becomes a human the moment an egg is fertilized, then you will advocate for laws that protect an embryo's right to live. Your definition of "human" will affect your vote. If you believe that God defined marriage as a life-long union between a man and a woman, then you will vote against laws that legalize same-sex marriage. In short, social policy deals with ethics and our ethics are informed by our worldview and our worldview is informed by our religion.

9) Good laws can't make good people.

Let's not expect a spiritual reformation to result from religious tolerance. Laws against same-sex marriage failed to protect us from no-fault divorce. We can't, finally, legislate morality, at least not a morality of the heart. Laws can restrain evil (putting a drug dealer behind bars) but won't promote virtue (ensuring a husband is faithful to his wife). By restraining evil we can promote the public good. We should aim to do so. It is good, for example, to have laws forcing divorced dads to pay child support. But we need to remember that such laws won't make the dads love their kids.

Even as we lobby for better laws, we are reminded that only the gospel of Jesus Christ can change people's

hearts. That's why it is more important for the church to be committed to the clear proclamation of the gospel than the strident protection of religious liberty. God does not need religious liberty to spark a revival—just look at the underground church in China!

Thankfully, as Christians we can do both; we can preach the gospel and advocate for religious liberty. But we need to be careful that advocating religious liberty or any other public policy never replaces faithfulness to the gospel.

10) Obedience to Christ may necessitate disobedience to cultural norms.

Let's be prepared to raise the ire of our neighbors. Paul said that a mark of ungodliness is "giving approval to those who practice evil deeds" (Romans 1:32). If attendance at a wedding is approval of a wedding, than the Christian ought not to attend. Christians may wind up disagreeing over what it means to "approve" of an evil deed, but the principle stands. Wherever you land on this particular question, remember that popularity does not make right any more than might does. Faithfulness to Christ will inevitably demand we take a position and a course of action that the world won't tolerate.

11) Obedience to Christ may necessitate disobedience to the state.

Let's be prepared to face civil punishment for following our conscience. In Revelation 18:4, John hears a voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her [Babylon], my people, lest you take part in her sins." The Spirit revealed to John that in the last days God's people would need to disobey the state ["come out of her"]. If the owners of Hobby Lobby believe obedience to Christ demands disobeying the Affordable Care Act, then they had no choice but to disobey the so-called "contraceptive mandate."

12) It will take time and wisdom to sort out the ramifications of the present culture shift.

Let's pray for wisdom. Each day the church is faced with new questions. Should you refer to your transgender friend "he" or "she"? Is attendance at a same-sex wedding approval of a same-sex wedding? Is baking a cake for a same-sex wedding, in fact, taking part in sin? Some Christians may choose to participate for the sake of evangelism while others refuse for the sake of holiness. Is there even freedom to disagree over the answers to the questions?

Wherever we land, there is no doubt religious liberty is in the crosshairs. The trajectory of the culture and the government is one of religious intolerance. Recognizing Christ has already won the war, we prepare for little battles as we await his return. We must be ready to be criticized by neighbors and perhaps imprisoned by the state while we aim to be salt and light in the darkness. We exalt our Savior in word and deed with the hope that the world will see our good works and glorify our Father (Matthew 5:16).

NO NEED FOR 1955

Our goal as Christians is not to go back to 1955. We should be thankful for the many changes we've seen since 1955. The past many years we've seen growing, ethnic diversity in our churches. Though there is so much room to grow, progress has been made. We've seen unreached people groups touched by the gospel. We've seen a revival of interest in theology that has done nothing but strengthen the local church. We have no need to return to some "golden age" of American history. Every season has its sinful thorns. Our job is to prepare for the days ahead.

How can we prepare?

–Be the church by holding fast to the Word of God, contending for the faith entrusted to the saints, and shepherding the flock of God entrusted to our care.

–Trust that the pressure we are facing to give up our biblical convictions regarding sexuality and marriage will only strengthen our resolve to stand for Christ.

–Admit that joining a church that is serious about the gospel is not for the faint of heart. A church that remains steadfast to the gospel with its myriad of ethical implications will become a target for cultural attack.

–Don't lose heart because in the days ahead we may better relate to our forefathers in the faith who knew what it meant to be "afflicted in every way, but not crushed" (2 Corinthians 4:8).

–Consider it an honor to align ourselves with Moses who chose "to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25).

–Most of all, embrace the teaching of our Savior who said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny

himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 6:24).

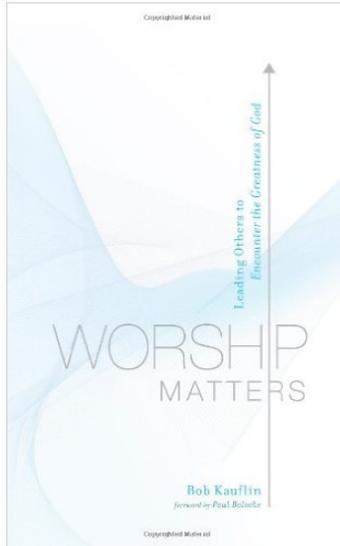
We don't need to go back to 1955, nor do we *need* religious liberty. What we need is a sinless Savior who died on the cross for our sins and called us to follow him. Rest assured, He is exactly who we have, and no court can take Him away.

~Aaron Menikoff

Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God

Written by Bob Kauflin

Bookstall Price \$12



Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God, is a worship leadership primer, filled with sage advice from Bob Kauflin, one of today's most influential musicians. The book is divided into four broad categories or parts, each targeted to a specific aspect of corporate worship. The first section, "The Leader," explores what a worship leader is supposed to be at heart, in his mind, by his hands, and through his life. Part Two, "The Task," describes what the worship leader is supposed to do. In it, Kauflin takes individual chapters to explain each of the nine phrases of his working definition of a faithful worship leader. In "Healthy Tensions,"

he considers some of the typical dichotomies leaders encounter when planning and evaluating corporate worship, including transcendence vs. immanence, planned vs. spontaneity, and internal vs. external. Lastly, in "Right Relationships," the author helps worship leaders step back and pay closer attention to how they relate to their church, ministry team, and senior pastor, with specific helps on how to cultivate healthy relationships with each.

Kauflin's writing style is simple and straightforward. Though it is written expressly for the worship leader, that doesn't mean it's irrelevant to others. Worship ministry team members will benefit greatly from part two, "The Task", by giving extended meditation on the goal and purpose of corporate worship leadership in the local church. Even if you have never been involved in music and worship ministry, you will benefit from understanding what goes into the planning and implementation of corporate worship; it will invigorate your anticipation for and appreciation of Sunday morning gatherings. The final chapter of the book is written to pastors, who, after all, are the local church's primary "worship leaders." So whether you are a worship leader, a worship ministry team participant, a member of the worshipping congregation, or a pastor (senior worship leader) of your local church, you will find multiple helps and rich thoughts in *Worship Matters*.

– RECOMMENDED BY ERIC CAMPBELL

Excerpts from the Book

1

"A faithful worship leader magnifies the greatness of God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit by skillfully combining God's Word with music, thereby motivating the gathered church to proclaim the gospel, to cherish God's presence, and to live for God's glory."

–So What Does a Worship Leader Do?, p. 55

2

"For years we've read about or experienced firsthand the 'worship wars'—conflicts over music styles, song selections, and drums. But far too little has been said about the worship wars going in inside us. And they're much more significant. Each of us has a battle raging within us over what we love most—God or something else."

–My Heart: What Do I Love?, p. 21

3

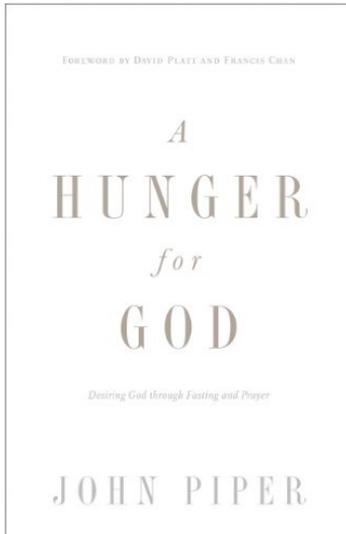
"In the thirty-plus years I've been involved in leading congregational worship, I've never found a truth that more consistently, powerfully, or rightly calls forth the passionate praises of God's people than this: **Christ died for our sins to bring us to God** (1 Peter 3:18). The gospel is not merely one of many possible themes we can touch on as we come to worship God. It is the central and foundational theme. All our worship originates and is brought into focus at the cross of Jesus Christ."

–...In Jesus Christ..., p. 72

A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer

Written by John Piper

Bookstall Price \$16



Is fasting Christian? What role does it have in the life of a believer and church? In *A Hunger for God*, John Piper presents a helpful theological and practical framework for a biblical, Christ-centered view of fasting. He states that the essence of Christian fasting is an “aching and yearning—and fasting—to know more and more of all that God is for us in Jesus. But only because he has already laid hold of us and is drawing us ever forward and upward in all the fullness of God” (48).

The book makes a compelling case that fasting should be part of the life of the believer through faithful interaction with the Scripture. Prayer and fasting are oft-neglected graces that can bring about a deeper satisfaction in God alone. As a result of indwelling sin, believers must constantly battle to set their longings and affections on the Creator rather than the created. As Piper points out, prayer and fasting are a means of grace in Christians’ lives to expose the idolatry of their hearts. They force us to ask ourselves “where do we find our deepest satisfaction – in God or his gifts” (57)?

A Hunger For God is a helpful book that will encourage and challenge believers to make fasting a part of their life not as a means of gaining an earthly reward, but simply to gain a greater love of God. By God’s grace, a right understanding and practice of fasting cultivates and expresses a greater hunger for him above all else. Whether you’re a new believer or have been walking with the Lord for decades, this book will serve as a helpful guide to gospel-centered fasting.

– RECOMMENDED BY ERIC BARBOUR

Excerpts from the Book

1

“The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night.”

–Introduction, p. 18

2

“If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great.”

–Introduction, p. 26

3

“The supremacy of God in all things is the great reward we long for in fasting. His supremacy in our own affections and in all our life-choices. His supremacy in the purity of the church. His supremacy in the salvation of the lost. His supremacy in the establishing of righteousness and justice. And his supremacy for the joy of all peoples in the evangelization of the world.”

–Fasting for the Reward of the Father, p. 75



My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

— *Psalm 139:15-16*

In Psalm 139:15-16, David continues in the same place he described in vv.13-14: the mother's womb. Even in the darkest of places, the Lord is there. This led David to praise the Lord for his careful and intimate creation of every person.

With technological advances like the 3D ultrasound, we can see detailed images of a baby's frame and features while in the womb like never before. Thankfully this service has saved countless children, who otherwise would have been aborted. Yet, v.15 is a reminder that though most people throughout the world and history have not seen 3D ultrasound images, the Creator God formed and sees the frame of every child "being made in secret." Even before a woman knows she has conceived, the Creator God has been diligently at work in her womb "intricately weaving" together his masterpiece of a boy or girl made in his image.

The Creator is also the Ruler of everyone he creates. "[I]n your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." God not only knows the intimate details of our

present but also our future, for he has ordained it. Before a single day is lived out, God knows and has destined it to be.

The greatest comfort available when facing the death of a child, be it in or out of the womb, comes from having a high view of God. Our sovereign Creator and Sustainer is all-good and does all things according to his character and plan. Christian who has lost a child, there is comfort in knowing that, though your days with your child were limited, and maybe you did not have the privilege of knowing them intimately, your heavenly Father and their Creator God wove them together beautifully and wonderfully in his image and for his glory. They may have died "in secret" but they were not alone or unknown. The Lord was there!

— BRAD THAYER

Graphic courtesy of The Verses Project. For more devotional material and memorization tools, visit www.theversesproject.com.



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BAPTIST CHURCH