

How to Disciple the Nations

By Stephen McDowell

Jesus gave us a clear commission to disciple the nations (see Matt. 28:18-20). Many modern Christians have relegated this command in the Great Commission to only converting individuals. Christians in the past had a much broader view of this commission. Matthew Henry said that "the principal intention of this commission" is to do your utmost to make the nations Christian nations."

What does it mean "to make the nations Christian nations"? What is a Christian nation? Simply stated, a Christian nation is one built upon the principles of God's word, and infused with the presence of God. Deuteronomy 4:5-8 reveals that for a nation to be great it needs the Spirit of God and the Law of God. This is what made Israel great among the nations.

The fruit of such a nation is liberty, both internal and external, personal and civil. The Bible teaches that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). Proverbs 29:18 tells us that "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained [perish; run wild], but happy is he who keeps the law." The Spirit and law/word of God are essential for liberating our nation. We must apply His entire word to our entire society through the Holy Spirit. Without that the people will run wild and our nation will perish.

Discipling nations begins in the heart

The discipling of nations begins with the regeneration of individuals. All Godly change in society begins in the heart of man, and since only God can change the heart, all change for good begins with God. This is why Christianity must be introduced into any nation that desires liberty,

justice, and prosperity. Fallen, sinful man must be transplanted from the kingdom of darkness, by the power and grace of God, into the Kingdom of light. Men need a new heart, but Christianity does not stop there. Men also need a new mind; they need to learn how to think Biblically and apply all of God's word to all areas of life.

Loving God with All Our Minds

The Bible teaches that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength



We must cultivate a passionate mind for truth.

(Mark 12:30). To live as God desires, and to disciple our nation as Christ commands, we must have a passionate heart and soul for Him, willing to do anything He asks and to follow Him anywhere. But we must also love God with all our mind and strength. We must exert energy to develop a Biblical worldview.

Jesus said that we will "make disciples of all the nations" by "teaching them to observe

all that I commanded you." We need to learn all that the Bible teaches in regard to personal and civil life. We must learn to think as Jesus thinks, to have a Biblical worldview. We must cultivate a passionate mind. The Bible instructs us that:

- We are to have knowledge with our zeal (Rom. 10:2).
- We are transformed by renewing our mind (Rom. 12:2). Our worldview (how we think) determines our actions. We love God with our minds when we think Biblically. We must bring the mind of Christ to bear upon our thoughts (which will affect our actions).
- We are to study to show our self approved and handle accurately the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15).
- We must search the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11).
- Our battle is not only in the spiritual but also the mental realm. 2 Corinthians 10:5 says "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." We must prepare in knowledge; for truth is a weapon and we need to learn to handle it accurately (2 Tim. 2:15).

Our growth and preparation as Christians include the spiritual, mental, and physical arenas. We must prepare in character and thought if we truly hope to see God's purposes fulfilled for us, and if we desire to see Godly revival and reformation occur — to see the nations become Christian nations. In fact, the extent and quality of reformation will be determined by how believers view all of life from the Bible's perspective.

Therefore, to disciple nations, we must

understand what the Bible teaches regarding personal growth and discipleship, and we must introduce the lost to these things. In addition, we must grow in a Biblical worldview, especially in the knowledge of how the nations can align themselves with the precepts of Godly government.

What is needed to disciple the nations?

Three general components needed to disciple a nation include:

1. **Prayer** — bringing God's grace and presence to man and society. Prayer undergirds and gives power to education and action.
2. **Education** — bringing God's truth to the mind. It gives us a standard by which to live and structure society. It is how we plants seeds of change.
3. **Action** — infusing God's truth and presence in society. This is the natural outworking of prayer and education; we should apply what we learn. As we act, the seeds will grow and produce fruit to be harvested.

Jesus said that we will "make disciples of all the nations" by "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." We will not attempt to look at all He commanded, but we will examine a few key areas we must understand if we hope to disciple the nations.

Key civil teachings of Jesus necessary for the discipling of nations

I. Jurisdictional authority

In Matthew 12:17-21 Jesus said: "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." Jesus is teaching an extremely important concept here — that of jurisdictional authority. Jesus used a coin with Caesar's image upon it to illustrate that civil government does

indeed have certain jurisdictional authority, such as in the area of taxation. However, Christ went on to pronounce that the state's jurisdiction is limited when He said that we are to render "to God the things that are God's." The inference is that there is a sphere of life where civil government (i.e. Caesar) has no jurisdiction at all. That sphere is implied here as involving the soul and mind of men, being made, not in Caesar's image, but in the image of God. Jesus was affirming that religious worship and opinions, and any endeavor relating to thoughts or speech, must remain completely free from government control.

This is the Biblical idea of the separation of church and state. It is not like the modern idea, which says we must remove God from public life. The principle of separation of church and state, the separation of school and state, and the separation of the press and speech from the control of the state, which are articulated in the First Amendment of the Constitution, are rooted in this historic political teaching of Christ. Before Christianity, the pagan world always included religion and education under the jurisdiction of the state. It was a radical political concept for Christ to declare that Caesar's power should be limited and, therefore, was used against Jesus when He was convicted of treason and crucified under Roman law. Christ's teaching has

since changed the western world.

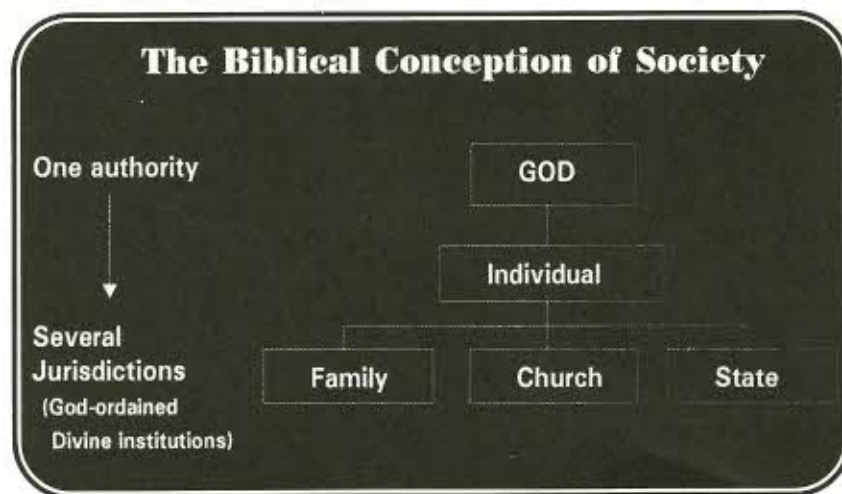
The responsibilities of the state are to be distinguished from that of the individual, family, and church. Usurpation of authority occurs when one jurisdiction encroaches upon another jurisdiction. The result is tyranny. Usurpation is exercising authority or power that belongs to another. It is "the act of seizing or occupying and enjoying the property of another, without right."

What jurisdictions has God established and what authority and responsibility has He given them?

All authority comes from God. He has established several divine institutions and jurisdictions on the earth through which authority is to flow. Our task is to find out to whom God has commissioned to do what. When one jurisdiction usurps the authority of another, the result is tyranny. The history of liberty is intertwined with the usurpation of power of one institution over another. The more a nation operates according to Godly jurisdictional authority, the freer that nation will be.

The diagram below depicts "The Biblical Conception of Society", with the divine institutions.

There are other jurisdictions where authority flows (that is, other spheres of authority), but these stem from the indi-





Biblical education is a means of bringing God's kingdom on earth, while present-day state education is the means of bringing man's kingdom on earth.

vidual, family, and church fulfilling their responsibilities. For example: business flows from the individual and family; education and schools flow from the family, primarily, but from the church, secondarily. A summary of the purpose and responsibilities of individuals and the divine institutions follows.¹

Purpose and Responsibilities of Individuals and Divine Institutions

The Individual's Purpose and Responsibilities:

1. Worship – “Love the Lord your God.” (Luke 10:27, Deut. 6:5)

* Man's primary purpose is to glorify God and enjoy him forever

- Personal prayer, Bible reading/study/meditation
- Assemble with other believers
- Christian Sabbath observance

2. Charity – “Love your neighbor.” (Luke 10:27, Lev. 19:9-18, Mt. 25:35-36)

* The Golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

- Assist the needy and show mercy
- Speak the truth – evangelism, exhortation, edification
- Involvement in society/government (conversion of institutions)

3. Work – “as [you love] yourself” (Lk. 10:27; Gen. 1:26-28, Gen. 2:15)

* That man is God's creation and made in God's image is the foundation for self-worth, self-preservation, human dignity, and work. Our calling or work is the means of fulfilling the cultural mandate of being fruitful and subduing the earth.

- Provide for self and family – individuals will start businesses and create wealth
- Bless the nations – occurs as individuals provide needed goods and services

The Family's Purpose and Responsibilities:

A family is simply a man, woman, children who are related by marriage, blood, or adoption. The ideal marriage has a man and woman who covenant together to fulfill God's desire for them to be fruitful and bless the world. Both parents are to fulfill the purpose and responsibilities. In this context fathers (in general, but not exclusively) lead in society, while mothers raise the next generations. (Gen. 2:18, 22-24; 3:16)

1. Dominion and Procreation (Gen. 1:28, 1 Tim. 5:10,14)

* Be fruitful and multiply, subdue the earth.

- Pro-life – sanctity of life (Gen. 9:6)
- Children – a blessing (Ps. 127:3-5)

2. Education (Deut. 6:6-7)

* “You shall teach your sons.”

- Fit children to fulfill their individual purposes and responsibilities (Pr. 22:6)
- Build Godly character (Gen. 18:19)
- Train in a Biblical worldview (Ps. 78:5)
- Discipline as well as instruction (Eph. 6:4)

3. Health and Welfare

* Practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13), especially for those of your own household.

- Preventative health care – proper exercise, nutrition, sanitation
We are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:17; 6:17; 2 Cor. 6:16) and should seek to take care of ourselves and those in our charge. God is concerned with sanitation (Deut. 23:12-13; Num. 19:11-22), with what we eat (1 Cor. 6:12-20; Phil. 3:18-19), and with how we take care of our bodies (1 Tim. 4:7-8 tells us that bodily discipline is of profit, but only for a temporal time, while we are in the body).
- Taking care of the sick, elderly, orphan, widow (1 Tim. 5:4,8,10,16; Deut. 15:7,8,11; Deut. 14:28-29)
- Saving and investing for your retirement and your posterity (2 Cor. 12:14, Pr.

19:14, Deut. 21:17)

The Church's Purpose and Responsibilities:

* The church prepares people to govern society (to rule, Ps. 8:6), and to fulfill the redemption and creation commissions.

1. Regular instruction of members in Biblical truth for every sphere of life

- Sunday preaching, regular classes, and other educational means (Mt. 28:18-20, 2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- Includes starting schools and colleges

2. Administer Sacraments and Church Discipline (1 Cor. 5:8-13; 11:23-25; Mt. 18:15-17)

- Corporate worship and sacrifice (Gen. 4:3-5, 26)
- Baptism and Lord's Supper (communion)
- Excommunication

3. Discipling, equipping, and organizing believers (Eph. 4:11-12, 16; Titus 3:8,14)

- Equipping the saints for the work of service, enabling them to fulfill their divine occupation or calling.
- Providing coordination and support for individuals and families to work in voluntary union with others to fulfill their purpose
- Pastors are to be role models of what the church teaches in their personal conduct and through their involvement in society.

The Civil Government's (State's) Purpose and Responsibilities:

1. Protect the righteous, i.e. law-abiding citizens (Rom. 13:3-4, 1 Pet. 2:13-14)

- Protection of life, liberty, and property from domestic and foreign lawbreakers. Governments are to secure God-given inalienable rights:

Life

Ex. 20:13—“You shall not murder”

- Self-defense
- Government protection

Liberty

Ex. 21:16—"He who kidnaps a man...shall be put to death."

- Freedom of worship
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of assembly
- Freedom of the press
- Freedom of schools
- Right to petition government

Property

Ex. 20:15 - "You shall not steal."

- Private property
- Individual enterprise
- Acquire necessities of life

b. Government coordinates civilian police for order and army for defense.

c. Protection of rights from government abuse as well, via:

- Decentralized government
- Separation of powers
- Election of representatives

2. Punish the evil doer, i.e. criminal (Ex. 20:13; 21:12; 22:2)

a. Set up constitution with just laws and penalties

b. Impartial judges and fair trial to establish justice

3. Administer God's justice

a. Civil leaders are ministers of God for good (Rom. 13:4).

b. They are to judge for God in matters under their jurisdiction.

God gives the means to each institution to enforce its authority.

In each of these spheres, the Biblical flow of authority is to be from the internal to the external. As God's Word and Spirit are established in individuals, there will be proper functioning of the family, church, and state. However, since man is fallen, his tendency is to act unlawfully. When this occurs, God has given each divine institution a means to enforce its authority:

- Family — rod (Pr. 13:24; Pr. 22:15; Pr. 23:13-14; Pr. 29:15, 17; Heb. 12:7)
- Church — excommunication (Mt. 18:15-18; 1 Tim 1:20; Tit. 3:10; 1 Cor. 5:11)
- State — sword (Rom. 13:4; Gen. 9:6)

If God's law-word is violated, it should be handled by the appropriate jurisdiction and with an appropriate penalty. We should discern (which requires a thorough knowledge of the Bible) if it is the responsibility of the family, church, or state to administer God's justice. In reality, the Bible teaches that God will Himself execute His justice when many of His laws are violated, hence limiting the punitive action of man.

The Bible also gives guidelines for the authority structure for each of the divine institutions. The Biblical forms of government for the family, church, and state are constructed so as to check the tendency of sinful man to abuse power.

Tyranny is the fruit of usurpation of authority.

Leaders throughout history have abused authority in doing what they are supposed to do (i.e., in trying to fulfill their divine purpose). The result is tyranny and bondage. But tyranny and bondage are also the result of leaders who mean well, yet are trying to do something outside their jurisdiction. Modern examples in American include:

1) Education — as the state has gained a monopoly in education, and humanism has become the religion of the state, the quality of education has declined, even while costs have sky-rocketed.

2) Welfare state — in the 1960s we launched a war against poverty, and

poverty won, even though we have spent trillions of dollars in this area.

Government has assumed a primary role in both of these areas as individuals, families, and churches have given up their responsibilities.

II. Civil government is a divinely ordained institution with limited powers (Gen. 9:6; Jn. 19:11; Rom. 13:1)

Another teaching of Jesus we must understand in order to disciple the nations is seen in John 19:11. In answer to Pilate, Jesus said, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above." Here Jesus asserts that civil authority is delegated and controlled by God. Paul states this in Romans 13:1 by saying, "there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." This also means that God is sovereign in human history and government; He is "the ruler over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5). This idea is important because many Christians today tend to view civil government as something "worldly" and unspiritual and, therefore, it is not necessary for the believer to study about or be involved in government. Spirituality involves more than religious and ecclesiastical topics.

Thus, Jesus instructed us that God ordained the state, as well as the church and family, and given each certain limited powers.

What relationship should there be between church and state, or God and government?

If church and state are to be separated jurisdictionally, then what relation should there be between the church and state in a nation? As institutions, the church, state, and family must be separated, but we should not separate God from government. In fact we cannot separate God from government any more than we can separate



"Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest, of our Christian nation, to select and prefer Christians for their rulers." John Jay, First U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice

God from the family. God created the family (Gen. 2-3) and God created government (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:1-4). Since God created and is sovereign over civil government (John 19:11), it is impossible to separate God from government.

All nations are built upon some religion.

While many governments do not acknowledge God, they, nonetheless, have their foundation in religion or the faith of the people. The predominant faith or worldview held by the citizens dictates a basic morality which will be reflected by those who govern the nation and make the laws. So all governments, and laws that flow from them, are built upon some religion or worldview which provides the basis for right and wrong behavior in society.

Who is the source of law in a society?

The source of law in a society is the god of that society. This fundamental concept is not being discussed today in the marketplace of ideas. If the Bible is the source of law, of what is right and wrong behavior — of what is lawful and unlawful — then the God of the Bible is the god of that society. If man is the source of law, where a majority or ruling minority determines what is right and wrong, then man is the god of that society (this is secular humanism).

The source of law and morality in America has been the Christian religion, though this has been changing as Christians have retreated from the war of worldviews. Christianity has produced ideas and principles fundamental to freedom. Things such as not stealing, not committing murder, and honest dealings with others came from the Bible. We do not want to separate such Biblical principles from government. If we do, the result will be anarchy or tyranny.

We, also, do not want to separate the church from teaching such principles. The pastor and church have the duty to teach Christians everything Christ commanded

them, including teachings that relate to the family and the state. The church has authority to speak the truth to all institutions in society — the church is "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). In terms of speaking the truth, it must not be separate from the family or the state. The church must inform them, for the church builds the people, and the people build the nation.

The Relation of God and Government

How then should God and government relate? Remember that for a nation to be great it needs the Spirit of God and the law/word of God (Deut. 4:5-8). Therefore, a government and its laws should be built upon God's higher law (i.e., it has the law/word of God), and rulers should be Christian and uphold God's law (it has the presence of God). Both of these, of course, are dependent upon the citizens first displaying these characteristics.

1) Government and laws should be built upon God's higher law.

Proverbs says, "Happy is he who keeps the law." This is true of men and nations. Civil rulers, or judges, are to be ministers of God for good (Rom. 13). They are to judge for God. They are to represent God more so than the people. As the civil leader of Israel, Moses made "known the statutes of God and His laws" (Ex. 18:16). This is how he judged in disputes between people. "God filled the civil officers of Israel with His Spirit, to signify that they were prophets of God, called to speak for God in the ministry of justice (Num. 11:16)."²

America's form of government and her system of laws were built upon God's higher law. One example showing this can be seen in the document which was the precursor of the Bill of Rights, the Massachusetts Body of Liberties, written by Rev. Nathaniel Ward in 1641. The Pentateuch was the basis for its criminal code, and "in

case of the defect of a law in any particular case" the standard was "the word of God."³

The Word of God is the law of liberty (Jam. 2:12). God's Word is the standard for law that will make men free.

2) Rulers should be Christian and uphold God's law.

The qualifications for Biblical leaders (presented in Aug. 2002 *Providential Perspective*) include knowledge, morality (Christian character), and true faith (fear of God) (Ex. 18:21; Deut. 1:13). There is a prophetic nature to the civil office. "Every reformation in Israel involved in part a return to the prophetic nature of the civil office."⁴ True Biblical revival not only involves reformation of the church but also reformation of the state.

The first chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, John Jay, said:

Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest, of our Christian nation, to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.⁵

Charles Finney, in his *Revivals of Religion*, listed the following as one necessary ingredient for the continuance of the revival that was occurring:

The Church must take right ground in regard to politics. . . . The time has come that Christians must vote for honest men, and take consistent ground in politics, or the Lord will curse them. . . . God cannot sustain this free and blessed country, which we love and pray for, unless the Church will take right ground. Politics are a part of a religion in such a country as this, and Christians must do their duty to the country as a part of their duty to God. . . . He will bless or curse this nation, according to the course they [Christians] take [in politics].⁶

We need Biblical leaders in government. Such leaders are much more than men who merely go to church or teach Sunday school or vote for prayer in public schools. Biblical leaders are men full of the presence and law/word of God, ministering His justice in the civil realm. We have much to do to raise up such men, and to educate the populace to want to have such men govern.

Other civil teachings of Jesus needed to disciple nations

The Bible presents many other civil teachings of Jesus that are necessary for the disciplining of nations. These include: 1. Government is to serve all men equally. 2. Individuals have inherent value. 3. Government is due the taxes and services of its citizens. 4. Social change is to be gradual and democratic, from the internal to the external. 5. The Mosaic law is applicable today. 6. Political and legal means can be used to achieve social justice. 7. Governmental injustice is to be resisted through protest, flight, and force in self-defense. 8. Military strength can be used to maintain peace. These teachings are examined in *America's Providential History and Liberating the Nations*.⁷

Education is a key element in disciplining the nations. Remember, Jesus said we are to teach the nations all He commanded. Biblical education is a means of bringing God's kingdom on earth. A nation is disciplined as God's kingdom (government) comes to individuals and every sphere of life. As seeds of the kingdom are planted in the hearts of men, they will grow from the inside-out and gradually produce the fruit of the kingdom in all aspects of society.

Present-day state education is the means of bringing man's kingdom on earth. While Biblical education is rooted in the absolutes of God's Word, state education is rooted in relativism, positivism, and humanism. We are seeing the fruit of this religion in the nations today. Therefore, establishing Biblical or Kingdom education is a must if we are to disciple the nations.

As we are filled with the presence and Word of God, and are taught a Biblical worldview, we will know where and how to act to bring about the disciplining of our nation. This action will affect all spheres of life. But when we act, there will be a price to pay.

The price we must pay to disciple the nations is great.

The life of the founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn, provides a great example for those seeking to bring about Godly reform in the nations.⁸ While imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1668 for expressing his religious views, Penn wrote the book *No Cross, No Crown*, in which he states that "Christ's cross is Christ's way to Christ's crown." What was true for Him, is true for us. We must bear the cross — pay the price — to see the nations disciplined.

Just like William Penn, we will encounter many crosses as we seek to disciple the nations, however if we bear the cross we will obtain the crown. Penn gladly bore the cross God had for him, and therefore, he also received a crown — for himself and millions more (as seen in his establishing religious and

civil liberty in Pennsylvania, which, in turn, affected liberty in America at large).

Satan will offer us a crossless conquest, as he did Jesus. He will tell us: "you don't have to die to yourself or follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. You don't have to fulfill your duties and responsibilities in all those areas of life. You don't have to stand up in the civil arena." People are prone to accept this offer for few are willing to die. People shrink back from pain and seek an easier way. We'll avoid anything that brings discomfort.

I am thankful that Jesus stayed upon the cross for me and all mankind. He was mocked and tempted to come down:

If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. . . . He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. (Mt. 27:40,42)

Jesus could have come down, yet, He endured the cross so we might experience the crown.

What duties have you been neglecting that you must begin to carry? What is the cross God would have you to bear? I would encourage you to not lay it down, for if you do so, you shall wear the crown and bring it to many others as well.

As we each embrace the duties and responsibilities we have in common, as well as our own unique special call, we can see the nations come and bow down before Him, giving Him the praise and honor that is due Him.⁹

End Notes

¹ The purpose and responsibilities of individuals and divine institutions is taken from *Liberating the Nations* by Stephen McDowell & Mark Beliles, pp. 90-92, and *Watchmen on the Walls* by Bruce Anderson, Mark Beliles, and Stephen McDowell, pp. 28-31, both published by the Providence Foundation.

² Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing

Co., 1973, p. 612.

³ "Massachusetts Body of Liberties", *Sources of Our Liberties*, Richard L. Perry, editor, New York: American Bar Foundation, 1952, p. 148.

⁴ Rushdoony, p. 612.

⁵ William Jay, *The Life of John Jay*. New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833, vol. II, p. 376, to John Murray, Jr. on October 12, 1816.

⁶ Mark Beliles and Stephen McDowell, *America's Providential History*, Charlottesville, Vir.:

Providence Foundation, 1989, p. 267.

⁷ For more on these see *America's Providential History and Liberating the Nations* by Stephen McDowell and Mark Beliles, published by Providence Foundation.

⁸ See *In God We Trust Tour Guide*, Chapter 3, by Stephen McDowell and Mark Beliles, and the audiotape *No Cross, No Crown*, both produced by the Providence Foundation.