

What is the Christian's Duty to God vs. Government? – Part 1

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Host: David Wheaton 00:08

What is the Christian's Duty to God vs. Government?

That is a topic we'll discuss today right here on *The Christian Worldview* Radio Program, where the mission is to sharpen the biblical worldview of Christians and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

I'm David Wheaton, the host, we're able to broadcast on the radio station, website or app on which you are listening today because of the support of listeners like you, and also our national sponsors, Samaritan Ministries, who provide a biblical solution to health care.

And by the way, we have been full-paying members of Samaritan Ministries for many years. I am not personally paid to speak on their behalf and that should tell you something of what we think about their health care services. You can find out more about *The Christian Worldview* or Samaritan Ministries by calling our toll-free number 1-888-646-2233 or by visiting TheChristianWorldview.org.

Persecution, imprisonment and murder of Christians is nothing new. The gospels recount the crucifixion of Christ, and the book of Acts chronicles the threats, beatings, jailing and stoning of first-century Christians. Today is no different for believers in communist China or North Korea, where Christians defy government edicts and gather secretly. In some Islamic countries Christians are jailed and martyred for refusing to keep silent about the gospel. In countries like the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand that were founded on Christian values with guaranteed individual liberties, freedom of religion and speech and so forth, the state has generally allowed citizens to pursue their faith as their conscience convicts them.

That changed about a decade ago, when the homosexual movement began prosecuting Christians for refusing to participate in so-called same sex weddings. It was a shock when Christians lost their baking or photography business or were fined for following biblical beliefs. But of course, the god haters wouldn't stop there. With COVID came a new opportunity to silence and persecute Christians as government mandated restrictions and closures of churches in the name of "community health and safety".

Most pastors and churches complied. But some, like Grace Live Church in Edmonton, Alberta, where James Coates pastors, understood the biblical command for churches to "not forsake our own assembling together" from Hebrews 10:25. Alberta's governing authorities couldn't allow Grace Life to defy their order. And so Pastor James was arrested and imprisoned. "For what?", you ask, for continuing to gather as a church in obedience to God's word.

Pastor James Coates joins us today on *The Christian Worldview* to explain what happened and to exhort Christians to obey God when government tries to usurp the authority that God has given to the church. Pastor James is the co-author of a new book entitled *God vs. Government: Taking a Biblical Stand When Christ and Compliance Collide*. This is our new featured resource that you can order for a gift of any amount of *The Christian Worldview*. We'll tell you how you can get that today. But let's get straight to the interview with Pastor James Coates.

James, thanks so much for coming on *The Christian Worldview* today. Briefly tell us about your background, and how you came to saving faith and why?

Guest: Pastor James Coates 03:47

Well, I'm from Toronto but originally grew up in a place called Scarborough Ontario, which is basically not even a suburb, but really connected to Toronto proper. I grew up in a non-Christian home, lived a very typical worldly, sinful lifestyle and after university with my conscience really testifying to me that the way that I was living was not right. At the behest of my mother, I took the Alpha course and was actually saved, strangely enough, in an Alpha course. It was the video, "Why Did Jesus Die?" that brought that about. That was back in the fall of 2003. I've even gone back and listened to that video just to test the integrity of

the gospel that's present in it. And it's there on a level that it's not, as far as I know, in that course anymore. That's not the kind of course that we would run in our local church now. But the Lord used that to deliver me from my sin.

From there I began to grow and over time since the desire to go into the ministry. I was working at Dell Computer Corporation at the time, and just came to the place of having an overwhelming desire to be trained to handle the Scriptures. The Lord used John MacArthur's ministry and *Grace to You* to solidify *The Master's Seminary* as the place to do that to be trained. I was at *The Master's Seminary* in 2007, all the way till 2010. And then in July 2010, I began to pastor the church that I'm in now. I was the Associate Pastor initially for the first two and a half years, but I was the regular preaching pastor at that time. And I've been at Grace Life ever since. So this is going to be coming up on the completion of 12 years of ministry at Grace Life Church.

Host: David Wheaton 05:32

James Coates joins us today here on *The Christian Worldview*, pastor of Grace Life Church just near Edmonton in Alberta, Canada. Now I want to read from your your book that you co-authored with Nathan Busenitz. He teaches historical theology at *The Master's Seminary*, where you attended. This is an excellent book so we're making it available to listeners. It's so relevant right now, titled *God vs Government*, basically trying to understand in this changing world we're living in what is the Christians duty to God and government? On page 16 of the book it says, "...of all the shutdowns and bans because of COVID on in-person gatherings, the most detrimental targeted churches. Whatever danger the virus poses to the well-being of our citizens, the closure of the church in America posed a greater threat. The ramifications became evident, within just a few months as civil unrest erupted with no spiritual influence to counter it." And that was a reference to what happened right here in Minneapolis with the the death of George Floyd, at the hands of police officers, and the riots and the violence in our country was burning over the summer of 2020. Interesting link between what was taking place with COVID and then not going to church. And then the the order of society breaking down.

What was your church are wrestling with at this particular time in 2020 when COVID hit in your province and Alberta ordered shutdowns or low attendance percentage of capacities at churches?

Guest: Pastor James Coates 07:09

Yeah, we got down to as low as 15, which is basically enough for your music team and your sound crew. We were at 15 for quite some time. So there was effectively no gathering is what that comes down to. And when everything first broke, there was a healthy degree of suspicion around the virus itself and the severity of it. And when it came time to wrestling through compliance, we reluctantly complied.

Initially, we looked at the situation, we looked at our ignorance with respect to the virus and we came to realize how ignorant we were even with respect to our legal system, our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the the recourse that we have available to us as a church. And we looked at the landscape of responses from many churches around North America, churches that we highly respect, including John MacArthur's church, and the going rate was compliance at that time.

And so we thought we would reluctantly comply, but even in the early going, maybe even the first Sunday of compliance, you could hear from the words that I expressed during the announcements that there was a reluctance. We were already feeling the tension between Romans 13 And Hebrews 10:25. And so I addressed that, and was already using the language in March of 2020, that we've got to take some time to figure out when the government is reaching beyond its jurisdiction here, and is bringing us to the point where we're going to need to obey God, not men.

And so that tension was there right away. I remember, and I even express this in the book, getting an email where I was essentially rebuked for not complying with more joy, and that there should be a joy as we seek to serve our community by shutting down our services. And you know, seeking to love our neighbor in that way. So the reluctance was evident, for sure. And even some of our people early on, even before we were open, they were ready. I mean, they were already prepared to open, thought we should be opening, prior to the time that we did but

we just waited for some information to roll in with respect to the virus and got a little more informed with respect to our legal system. And so it wasn't until June 2020 that we opened our doors and begin to invite people to make their own decision with respect to social distancing, masking, and attendance.

Host: David Wheaton 09:37

James Coates with us today on *The Christian Worldview*, the co-author of *God vs. Government*, an excellent book. This is a most relevant book for our day and age. You can get it for a donation of any amount to *The Christian Worldview*, just get in contact with us the usual ways.

You started to meet together, then, as a church in June of 2020, You're not a gigantic church, I think you said you had about 350 people attending around that time, so you're a mid-sized church, let's say, but this got the attention of the Alberta Health Services. Fast forward toward the end of that year, maybe in the fall of that year and you detail this. It's a riveting story, by the way, to read about this in the book; the Alberta Health Services begin to come to your church. So what was that like to have them and then eventually the police from Alberta come to your church?

Guest: Pastor James Coates 10:29

Well, with HS [Health Services] coming to our church, and that's our Alberta Health Services, or health governing body, when they began coming to our church and we began receiving some complaints there was certainly some unrest and consternation felt for me, as that was taking place. But things certainly escalated.

Once, the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] was also attending our church. I remember driving into our parking lot with the RCMP parked in our parking lot. And just you know, that was on the way into a Sunday morning service and just all that, that you feel in that particular moment as things were heating up, and they didn't really heat up until end of November 2020. And then into December, I think it was December 13th. The first time we had the RCMP in our services. And so I'm basically beginning the service and the announcements, acknowledging the fact that the RCMP are present. And our people certainly

knew, at that point in time anyway, and I was incorporating the gospel message into the announcements to ensure that they, as well as, the HS representative heard the gospel. We would start, our service announcements would take place, then we began to sing, they would have all the information they need to deem as non-compliant and they would leave. So once they would leave we could relax a little bit, as it were. But it was a challenge. It added a whole new element to preaching and everything else as far as preparation and all that you would go through in a week to be ready for Sunday.

It was a whole new level of intensity that I was experiencing in those weeks, and it goes all the way until February when I was in prison. That was the most intense period of time I would say in my entire life. I mean, my adrenal glands took a beating in that time. And it was, but the Lord was faithful and He gave us everything we needed to persevere.

Host: David Wheaton 12:27

The RCMP is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. James Coates with us today here on *The Christian Worldview*, the co-author of *God vs. Government*.

Now we're skipping through the story pretty quickly, because we have a lot to cover today. But basically, this came to a head in mid to late December 2020. And you delivered a message that you describe in the book, but just briefly tell us about this. I think it may have been one of the final messages you gave before you were arrested. And you said you pounded the pulpit and this is something you've never done before. Tell us about that message and just what your state of mind was at that time.

Guest: Pastor James Coates 13:08

Well, yeah, and to clarify, that's December 20. That sermon was called, "The Time Has Come", it's one of the chapters in the book and it's been reworked for the purpose of the book. That was not the sermon that I preached prior to my imprisonment. The one prior to my imprisonment was called "*Directing Government To Its Duty*". In God's providence, the timing of everything and the way that sermon came together, on February 14, that was a sermon that He effectively just dropped out of heaven into my lap and I preached it. I'm a

cessationist, for the record, so I'm not trying to rewrite the script on the spiritual gifts and the ceasing of prophecy, but it was a sermon, where an excerpt from it ended up on the six o'clock news on Monday evening, and, and it was like the perfect excerpt. I mean, it was an excerpt that just built up to the declaration that Jesus Christ is the head of the church. And when we heard that, amidst all of the concern revolving around the attention we were now getting, from not just the governing authorities, but the media, and the community, and everything else. That put wind in our sails. When we heard that we thought, wow, I mean, this is, this is why we get out of bed in the morning. My friend, Tim Stevens who was also arrested, when that sermon dropped, he said, "You're now the most hated man in Alberta".

And so that kind of gives you an idea of kind of where that was at. It's interesting to with that title, because I couldn't get away from that title "The Time Has Come". And even when I wrote the book, my portion of the book, I couldn't tell you why I titled it that. And yet I now know why, "The Time Has Come", in the sense that, it's now time for the church, to stand firm and go toe-to-toe with the governing authorities. That's why that sermon is in place. We've been anticipating that time in North America when the government will begin to reach inside the walls of the church and and step into its jurisdiction that's not theirs. And that time has come. It is now time for the church to resist and oppose a government overreach.

Host: David Wheaton 15:13

Okay, we need to pause for a moment. You are listening to *The Christian Worldview*, and David Wheaton. You can support this radio ministry by calling 1-888-646-2233, visiting TheChristianWorldview.org or writing to PO Box 401 Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

Featured Resource: God vs. Government 15:34

[Tucker Carlson] Pastor James Coates was arrested and sent to prison a couple of weeks ago in Canada. What did he do? He held a church service.

15:41

[Pastor James Coates] And it isn't the government's responsibility to protect us from a virus. What's their responsibility? To protect our God given rights.

Two days after that sermon, Pastor James Coates was arrested and imprisoned. He has now co-authored an important book titled *God vs Government: Taking A Biblical Stand When Christ and Compliance Collide*. *God vs. Government* is a 208-page softcover and retails for \$17.99. You can order a copy for a donation of any amount to The Christian Worldview. Go to TheChristianWorldview.org or call 1-888-646-2233 or write to Box 401, Excelsior, Minnesota 55331. That's 1-888-646-2233 or TheChristianWorldview.org.

Program Announcement, Host: David Wheaton

David Wheaton here, host of *The Christian Worldview* Radio Program, listeners are often surprised to learn that we as a ministry pay to broadcast on the radio station, website or app on which you are listening today. That expense is recouped through listeners like you making a donation or becoming a Christian Worldview Partner.

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Host: David Wheaton 17:38

Welcome back to *The Christian Worldview*. I'm David Wheaton, visit our website TheChristianWorldview.org where you can subscribe to our free weekly email and annual print letter. You can order resources for adults and children and support the ministry.

Now back to the interview. James Coates is our guest today on *The Christian Worldview*, a Canadian pastor who was imprisoned for keeping his church open during the COVID lockdowns in Canada. He's also the co-author of a book, *God*

vs. *Government*, just released that we are offering. This is an excellent book that will, I think, help frame what many of us have been really pondering over the last couple years when civil liberties and government crackdowns on our faith and so forth are taking place. We're offering it for donation of any amount to *The Christian Worldview*, just get in contact with us the usual ways: call us toll free 1-888-646-2233 or go to our website, TheChristianWorldview.org.

Let's go forward now into February 2021. You gave that last message which you just referenced. And you knew now, they had been back, the warnings have been coming, and now you knew you were going to be arrested. What was the realization like that you were going to be arrested? And then not only arrested, but be imprisoned, for continuing to keep your church open?

Guest: Pastor James Coates 18:58

Well, yeah, and I was arrested twice. The first time was the seventh of February and that took place after a service in our office where I was effectively arrested and released in the same moment. Then on the 14th, I knew that was going to be problematic because in my first arrest, I was given an undertaking and that undertaking demanded that I comply with the Public Health Act which of course we couldn't do. And so I refuse to sign that undertaking. And that's what's written the officer wrote, "refused to sign" and so I went into the next Sunday knowing that even though I did not sign that undertaking, which meant that I didn't agree to it, it was still nevertheless binding.

So when we had that service on the 14th it was a sort of wait and see, you know after service, what the fallout is gonna be from that. We had word they wanted me to turn myself in on Tuesday. Monday was a holiday, so that was kind of them because that meant I wouldn't be sitting in a jail cell Sunday and Monday waiting for the justice of the peace to open up on Tuesday. So I turned myself in on Tuesday, and was brought before the JP [justice of the peace] and was given a condition of release that again required that I comply with the Public Health Act, which would mean no longer gathering, and having to go down to capacity limits and mask and social distance and all of that. And we had already resolved that we could not comply with the public health orders, because to do that, would be to surrender the headship of Christ over his church to Caesar. And so I couldn't

sign that condition. So I, and that was not difficult to do because the conviction was already there.

But when I refused to sign it, and now had to embrace the reality of what that would mean. That was certainly challenging, because without being released, they have to detain you and hold you in custody. And that means going to the Edmonton Remand Center, which is effectively a maximum security prison. So because I would not sign my condition, I ended up at a maximum security prison. When I got there. They were sending officers to me throughout that time in the early going to help me understand “So, you realize you do not need to be here, correct. You can just sign your condition and walk out the door; you just say the word and we'll get your papers and you can sign and leave?” And I'm like, “Yes, I understand that”. “Why aren't you doing that? Why? Why are you staying?” “Well, I can't, I can't sign that condition. Because it would violate my conscience, that condition requires that I not do the thing that I'm called to do.”

And so it was really interesting to watch them process that and try and appreciate what was going on. And it would get back to me, they would say, you know, “He's really polite”, and you know, but they could see that I was immovable and resolved and I give God the glory for that. So it was a challenging time. But the Lord was certainly with me, even while I was in prison, and and really proved, what Psalm 139 teaches us that whether I make my bed in heaven, or in Sheol the Lord is there, I can't flee from His presence, all the same gracious providence that I've come to know, in the Christian life was there with me and in prison. And that's just a real comfort, I think to all of us to know that no matter what we go through, as God is sovereign over every detail of it, He is going to be there to care for us and and to strengthen us in the midst.

Host: David Wheaton [22:22](#)

That is so encouraging. I remember at the time we actually covered this on the program, and it was just so inspiring to so many people to have a pastor standing up for the truth of God's Word over the mandates, the commands, of governments. So thank you for doing that James. James Coates is our guest today here on *The Christian Worldview*, the co-author of a book we're featuring right now, *God vs. Government*.

I want to play a soundbite for you, from someone you know, well, that took place during an interview done while you were in prison. And then I'll ask you to follow up with a comment. This is from the Tucker Carlson program on Fox News.

Tucker Carlson sound bite: 23:03

Pastor James Coates was arrested and sent to prison a couple of weeks ago in Canada. What did he do? He held a church service. His wife Erin said he had a very tough time in jail. He was placed in a two-week quarantine only allowed to leave his cell twice for 15 minutes each time. It's a shocking story. We spoke to Erin Coates earlier about her husband's case. Here's what she told us:

Ms Coates, thanks very much for coming on. It's hard to believe it's shocking, really, that your husband is in jail. First, how's he doing?

Erin Coates 23:31

I don't even really know what to say. How is he doing? Um, he is, he's a shepherd. He's a Bible teacher. He's a theologian, he's not able to shepherd the people that he loves. He's not able to challenge his mind. He's not able to serve in the way that he loves to serve people. So this is, this is hard on him.

Tucker Carlson 23:51

So you grew up in the country? Do you recognize it now?

Erin Coates 23:56

No, I don't this is definitely not the nation that I grew up in.

Tucker Carlson 24:01

What do you think? What do you think happened?

Erin Coates 24:04

Well, I think there's been a - we're like a boiling frog for a while. I think our freedoms have just been slowly stripped from us and so slowly over time that we didn't even realize it. And so when something like a health order is put in place that takes away your freedoms, it's not shocking to people. And it really should be shocking to people that there is a pastor in jail right now, who's given his life to

sacrifice and love other people, to worship God. That's not shocking to a lot of people and it really should be. We're on a dangerous road right now. And I think because we've just been in the pot for so long, boiling, that people aren't really realizing the danger that we're facing as a nation.

Tucker Carlson 24:44

Throughout the United States. We've seen Christian ministers harassed because they are Christian ministers and therefore disobedient, they serve a higher power. You haven't seen this happen to people who run abortion clinics or strip bars or marijuana dispensaries. Do you believe (that's in this country), do you believe your husband was singled out because he's a Christian pastor?

Erin Coates 25:07

Well, I have to believe that the enemy is singling him out. We have a real enemy who really hates the Lord Jesus Christ and really hates the blood-bought body that He purchased on the cross and has given new life to, yes, we have an absolute real enemy, and he uses people to target the ministers of God. We know that through Scripture. We know that through church history. And so I really believe that they are being targeted in our country.

Tucker Carlson 25:33

I think a lot of people watching this, who would have maybe dismissed what you just said a year ago, are now maybe taking it a little bit more seriously. I appreciate your coming on. Your husband is blessed to have a wife like you, thank you,

Host: David Wheaton 25:44

James, when you hear that interview of your wife, and it's incredibly touching, what it must have been like for you to be in jail as your wife is on national media, not only defending you and the principle of individual liberties, but also talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. What are your thoughts today, looking back at that time, knowing you were in prison at the time, and this was taking place?

Guest: Pastor James Coates 26:15

Well, it takes me right back to that moment. And I feel a lot of what I was feeling at that time. What the Lord did and giving my wife that opportunity on Tucker Carlson to do is significant and the way He enabled her to speak in that moment, as well, was powerful. And really, that that interview was significant, we think, in moving the dial of our government to effect my release, because that interview was recorded about a week ahead of an agreement that was put in place for my release. And then it was then televised again, a week or so after it was recorded, and we really think that it was that interview because there was a lot of rumblings that that was going to be coming out. It was that interview that made our government go, "we've got to do something". The longer that I was in prison, the more pressure that was being placed upon our governing authorities to move and I think I had proven that I was not going to sign that condition. And they tried to make an example of me. And it effectively backfired. It was a miscalculation on their part.

And it may, in the end, be part of what brings to conclusion the political career of our premier here in Alberta. I think the book is compelling for a lot of reasons. I think it can be a real encouragement because you get to see the way the Lord ministered to me at various points throughout that time. And I think it can be preparatory for the challenges that we're all gonna face as we move forward into the future.

Host: David Wheaton 27:55

James Coates with us today, the pastor of Grace Life Church in Edmonton, Alberta. He was the one that was imprisoned for keeping his church open during the COVID shutdowns back in 2020-2021. Tell us about the strongest impression of your time in prison. And then maybe one example of the opportunities God was giving you to share the gospel with either guards or inmates.

Guest: Pastor James Coates 28:23

Well, I was in jail for 35 days. Again, I think the care the Lord gave to me while I was there is what stands out the most. The question you've just asked is probably the most common question that I am asked. And when I am asked that question, I go to God's providential care for me in prison. He was with me, just as

he always is. And it's a really wonderful thing, to go into a situation like that, where there's all kinds of unknowns. You're thrust into really a completely different world than you're used to. It's got a whole new culture, you've got all kinds of things you're wondering about based on what you've been exposed to, either through Hollywood as it relates to jail, and everything else. You don't really know what you're about to embark upon. And yet the Lord was there and He was with me the whole way. That's really what stands out.

I, initially, I was in quarantine. I didn't have much interaction with the inmates until I got moved into general public, or general population, where now we had an hour at a time that we were out of cells three times a day, and that's when inmates would begin to interact with me. And so when I got moved into general population, instantly, inmates are coming to me and wanting to talk to me, wanting counsel, I'm sharing the gospel to them through the door. It was instantaneous that I was able to begin interacting with inmates. I'd be on my exercise and walking past cells on other floors and guys would bang on the door and they would share with me what's going on in the world and asked me to pray for them and and I would do that. I was able to lead a Bible study with a group of men through the Gospel of John. And that was at their request. God is good and faithful and He used that time to, to minister to those men and what the Lord does with that, we'll have to wait until we get to heaven.

Host: David Wheaton 30:21

We're just thinking that you're going to see more fruit from that. I have a feeling some of those guys who get out of prison are going to be finding their way to Grace Life Church in Edmonton. And you'll see how God is sovereign overall, how He ordains providentially the circumstances of life for His glory and our good

James Coates with us today, here on *The Christian Worldview*, pastor of Grace Life Church in Edmonton. The book is titled *God vs. Government*. We really like this book. We're offering it for a donation of any amount. Just get in contact with us the usual ways through our website TheChristianWorldview.org, or calling us toll free 1-888-646-2233.

By the way, also in the first half of the book is also the Grace Community Church story in Los Angeles, where John MacArthur pastors, and Nathan Busenitz, your co-author, tell us about that story of that church staying open. In the end, the fines and the legal threats coming from Los Angeles County and the government there, but we won't get into that today. Hopefully, we'll have Nathan on in a future program to tell their story.

But the second part of the book goes from the story to the stand. And this is really more of an apologetic on Christians and government. I'm just going to read the foreword to the book, which was written by John MacArthur, in view of recent events: "Three basic biblical truths must be emphasized. First, the church is essential. Second, the church must gather regularly and corporately. Third, the church is duty-bound to obey Christ even when doing so violates governmental regulations, and restrictions. Given the fundamental nature of these New Testament priorities", he writes, "it's hard to believe they would prove controversial, especially among evangelicals, but here we are, there has been a great deal of both controversy and compromise, which is why the message of this book is so necessary." I'm gonna ask a bit of a touchy question here of James, do you believe that other churches and pastors who followed government orders to shut down their services and just comply as long as government told them to, were they being disobedient to God?

Guest: Pastor James Coates 32:33

In the book, we express the reality that elders do have the prerogative to assess how they're going to navigate something like this. And they've been given that authority in Christ to exercise. That said, I would say for sure, what this has revealed is a low ecclesiology. And I'm at this point in time, I mean, there would have been a point in time earlier in the pandemic, when more grace would be extended. Now that we're this far in, and hopefully, you know, coming to the endemic side of it. I think, I think it is disobedience. I think it's gotten to the point where it is now sin. If individuals are still complying to, to these health restrictions, and they're using Romans 13 to do it, I believe that they're out of step with their calling, out of step with the responsibility given to them as shepherds, that they are failing to fulfill their ministry.

And so that's the difficulty of it. There's a period of time where you want to allow people to come along and develop the convictions necessary to work through this. But for those individuals, who would just continue to Romans 13, basically all the way to the Lord returns, that there's really no threshold, there's no, there's no limit to Romans 13. And so the the government wants to impose permanent COVID-19 restrictions, and they're going to Romans 13, all the way to the return of the Lord. Clearly, that is an unbiblical position to take. And I think that's what we've seen is that there are a lot of voices out there, that they've got no room in their theology for, for these COVID restrictions to become an overreach of governing authority, power, whereby they would be brought to the place of having to say, No, we're going to obey God, not men. And that's problematic.

There is something deficient in their understanding of Romans 13. There is something deficient in their understanding of the Lordship and headship of Christ. There is something deficient in their ecclesiology that they would make that level of modification and and not realize that it's going to have a harmful impact on the body of Christ. So I think we've gotten to the point now where, where the threshold has been breached, where to not open your church and resist the governing authority. At this particular point in time, you are now in sin.

Host: David Wheaton 35:05

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National Sponsor: Samaritan Ministries 35:24

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How do you break down American Christianity?

Whiteness causes blackness of heart. That message that they're going out and taking the world is not, "you need to repent of your sin, receive Christ", instead the message that you actually have is, "they are under the weight of racism, or sexism, or homophobia".

The preceding is from *Enemies Within: The Church*, a two-hour documentary film that exposes how social justice ideology is infecting the church. You can order the DVD for a donation of any amount to *The Christian Worldview*, go to TheChristianWorldview.org or call 1-888-646-2233, or write to Box 401, Excelsior, Minnesota 55331. That's 1-888-646-2233 or TheChristianWorldview.org.

Host: David Wheaton 37:28

Thanks for joining us today on *The Christian Worldview*. I'm David Wheaton. Just a reminder that today's program and past programs are archived at our website, TheChristianWorldview.org. Transcripts are also available.

Now back to the interview. James Coates is with us today on *The Christian Worldview*. One of your fellow pastors from Canada was on the program recently, Andrew DeBartolo, he pastors over in Ontario, I believe in Kingston, Ontario. And he gave a very interesting interpretation and much stronger, less compliance, interpretation. "Just do what the government says" interpretation that you often hear from Christians about Romans 13. And so as you think about this, with individual liberties being taken away, whether it's you know, you can't meet as a church, because of COVID, you either have to take this vaccine or you can't

cross the border, you can't keep your job, all the lies around COVID. You know, masks are effective, the vaccine, you know, what is going to stop the spread.

You've had freedom protests in Canada, we're having in America. You had a bill passed and in Canada, you can't do "conversion therapy" now defined in the most broad way that would take away, you know, let's say your church's ability, or restricting your church's ability to counsel someone to come to saving faith and in overcoming the sin of homosexuality. I just read recently, on the website Reformation Charlotte, a new law in China titled "Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Servers", as it's called, will take place starting March 1, that will strictly forbid the sharing and exchanging of any religious information online, including social media.

And so there's just lots of examples of how this noose is tightening for Christians around the world. How do we think about Christians obligation or duty to obey government in the midst of a situation where government is going against the God-given rights that God has given to us? And you actually say this in the book you use this line "...government's role is to protect rights, not protect life". So talk about Romans 13 and help us understand that passage more in the light of what is taking place today.

Guest: Pastor James Coates 39:54

The approach to Romans 13 that we're talking about here, it really effectively shouldn't be novel at all. I mean, we all recognize that there are limits placed on Romans 13. Even those who have complied throughout the pandemic recognize there are limits that are placed on Romans 13, that when the government is compelling you to either do what God forbids, or to not do what God commands that you are now, the government, has crossed the line, and it's now time to obey God, not men. Everyone recognizes that. In practice, it's clear that there are infringements on commands to do certain things, as well as the government forbidding what God commands, we've clearly breached that threshold here and somehow pastors have found a way to say no, the, the government's not really telling us to do anything that were forbidden by God. They're not really infringing on any of the commands that God has given to us. And so and when you do that, you're just saying, well, when it comes to the corporate gathering, we can just do

whatever we want with that thing, we can just slice and dice that thing six ways from Sunday.

And at the end of the day, we're not actually meddling with the means of graces, we're not meddling with the the structure of the church as God has ordained it. We're just simply modifying that which is modifiable. And I think that that just shows a very, very weak and low ecclesiology. And so when it comes to Romans 13, we're not talking about a novel interpretation here. It's not that difficult that the government has been given a particular role. Their authority comes from God. The fact that it comes from God places limits and purposes on it. And they have a particular role they are to play and their role is to protect the God given rights of their constituency. And that's not protect life, per se, but it's to protect the right to life.

And so when governments get into trying to protect its constituency from a virus, they are getting into a lane that is not theirs. We don't need the government to protect us from a virus. We don't even think the government is competent to do that. And so, it's just not their responsibility. They can provide us information, they can give us insight. They can make some recommendations and suggestions. But when push comes to shove, the government is not there to protect us from a virus and as soon as the government gets into that realm, and begins to, to infringe on God-given rights, in that process they've completely missed their whole purpose.

Their whole purpose is to protect the God given rights that are given to man, that we would then be able to fulfill our role and function in the world. And so, you know, when it comes to even what Andrew expressed, I would doubt that what he expressed is that novel. He's probably just expressing what we've always said about Romans 13. We're just now saying it in a context where we actually have to obey God, not men. And that's where all of these other voices are saying, No, this isn't that time. We're not there yet. There's nothing to see here. And I think they're just missing the boat significantly.

Host: David Wheaton 42:59

I would have played you the soundbite. But just for the sake of time, I'll just refer our listeners back to the interview with him. It was in February of 2022 with Andrew DeBartolo and they can hear that interview there. And I think you, too, from hearing what you just said there, I think you, too, would be very much in lockstep on your understanding of Romans 13.

Again, James Coates with us today on *The Christian Worldview*, the co-author of *God vs. Government*. We have it really liked this book. We encourage you to read it. It's very thought provoking. It's helpful during our time that we're living and you can get it for a donation of any amount to *The Christian Worldview*, The ChristianWorldview.org is the website, or call us toll free 1-888-646-2233.

There's much more we could talk about teasing this out of "civil disobedience" which you address in the book. Because after all, that's what you did as a church, you were civilly disobedient and I think biblically justified for doing so. What has been the final result of this? What has this done to the spiritual life of you, your family, and the members of your church?

Guest: Pastor James Coates 44:04

Well, I think personally for me, it's helped to untether me ever more from this world. As you go through what we did you begin to, to let go of some of the things that are, or you wouldn't even necessarily know you're holding on to. But you know, your home, financial security, your family, everything that that is threatened as you go toe-to-toe with the governing authorities, you basically have to lay down on the altar before God and and put them in His hands and be willing to walk away from them all together.

And so I think for me personally, as well as, for many in our congregation, I think that's been the impact. I also think that the impact of this on the life of our church has been to lay aside childish things. This is a time that is calling for and demanding of us that we be walking with the Lord abiding richly in Christ. And so I think that a lot of folks have grown immensely in this time by laying aside both sin and the encumbrances that weigh us down, so that we would run the race before us with more endurance and vigor.

And I think it, you know, as far as my children are concerned, you know, the, the lasting impact of that on them is yet to be seen. They've gone through a difficult time, it seems that they've done well in the midst of it. But they've obviously seen that, that when push comes to shove, we're practicing what we preach. And I think that's a good healthy environment for a child to grow up in. It means that that when it comes time to follow Christ, it's real and it comes with a cost, that it's not easy. We'll have to see the real lasting impact of all of this on them as they grow and mature and reflect back on what they've been through.

But I think, all the way around when I look at all that we've gone through, personally, corporately, as a family, and everything else. There's no way in which we are not better off. The Lord has blessed us immensely, in every possible way. And so we took a stand, it was difficult, but there's no regret. I would do the exact same thing all over again in a heartbeat. And I realized that there may be more difficulty on the horizon.

Host: David Wheaton 46:26

Yeah, this is just, I think, early on in your story, James, and for where the world is going. But we are so thankful that you came on *The Christian Worldview* today. It's great to hear your story. But even more, thank you for obeying God over government. It's been an inspiration to many people, not only in Canada, not only in the United States, but around the world. Thank you for allowing God to strengthen you to obey Him and be a model for what we're going to need to be I think, in the western world going forward. So thanks again for coming on the program. We just wish all of God's best and grace to you and your family and Grace Life Church.

Guest: Pastor James Coates 47:05

Thank you for having me, it's been a pleasure.

Host: David Wheaton 47:08

If you missed any of the interview today, you can always go to our website, TheChristianWorldview.org and hear the entire interview. You can also order the transcript. Those are available within a few days after the program airs.

Also just a reminder that we are featuring Pastor James Coates book that he has co-authored titled *God vs Government: Taking a Biblical Stand When Christ and Compliance Collide*. This is a 208-page, softcover book that retails for \$17.99. It is our new featured resource that you can order for a gift of any amount to *The Christian Worldview*, just get in contact with us by calling us 1-888-646-2233 and Rosie will take your call. Or you can order online, which is very simple, go to [The ChristianWorldview.org](http://TheChristianWorldview.org), or you can write to us at Box 401 Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

Now, of course, James, his story isn't unique. And frankly, it's not even extreme compared to what many believers have faced over the centuries, with the long imprisonments, torture, beatings, death. But this took place in Canada, which I think gives us a preview that much more is to come. Pastors who clearly preach the Word and street evangelists, they're like "canaries in the coal mine", that indicate how free a society is when they get shut down. Watch out.

And it's just shocking how quickly dissent is silenced now in our country, and in Canada, other Western nations, by government, and also by social media, but persecution only increases the strength and even the size of a church. Persecutors never get that, they just keep on persecuting Christians hoping that it will go away. But it doesn't. James said that his church has grown from about 350 people before his arrest, to now over 900 since this all happened.

So the question is, as we close today, "How to balance obedience to God versus obedience to government?". Number one, we need to accurately handle the Word of truth. For instance, the verse in Hebrews 10, about not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, that means in-person church, "ecclesia": the word for church means "assembly or gathering". That doesn't mean watch online, which is fine for those who can't come to church, whether it's a person who's shut in or sick or maybe highly susceptible. But that doesn't mean for the rest of us with a virus with a 99.98% survival rate. And number two, that leads to we need to obey God rather than men. When the apostles in the book of Acts were told to stop preaching in Jesus name. What did they do? Well, let's read it in Acts 5, "when they, the religious leaders of the day the governing authorities brought them they stood them before the council, the high priests questioned them

saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name. And yet as you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us'", [in other words, comply, what's the matter with you?] Verse 29, "But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men'". That is the the basis for why Christians need to know when to obey government, and when to obey God.

When a government commands something that is expressly forbidden by God, we don't obey. Which brings us to point three, how to balance obedience to God versus government. And that is to trust God, know the Word, obey God rather than men, and trust God for the results. Acts 5:40, another time that apostles didn't obey, "...after calling the Apostles in they flog them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them". What was the apostles response? Were they discouraged? Do they go away with their tails between their legs? And say, "why didn't we just obey government"? Here's what they said in verse 41, of chapter five "So they went on their way from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day in the temple and from house to house they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

There was a cost for following Christ, you're never going to be accepted by the mainstream. Jesus said, Anyone who wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me. And this is why if you are listening today, and you have never been reconciled, made right with God, if you are alienated from him, because you are living in sin and haven't received his offer of reconciliation, I would just urge you in the strongest terms to repent of your sin and put your faith in who Christ is. He's the son of God, the perfect Son of God and what He did for you, on the cross, He bled and died to pay the penalty for your sin. And then He rose again and ascended into heaven, and He's coming back to judge and to reign, and He's commanding all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel.

You can find out more by going to our website, TheChristianWorldview.org and clicking on the page, "What must I do to be saved?".

Thank you for joining us today on *The Christian Worldview* Radio Program. Thanks also to listeners like you and Samaritan Ministries for funding today's program. In just a moment, there'll be information about how you can support the program, hear a replay, or order transcripts and resources. So be encouraged. We may live in a challenging world, but Jesus Christ and His word are the same yesterday, and today and forever and Jesus is coming back to rule and reign, you can count on that. So until next time, "Think Biblically, Live Accordingly, and Stand Firm.

The mission of *The Christian Worldview* is to sharpen the biblical worldview of Christians and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We hope today's broadcast encouraged you toward that end. To hear a replay of today's program, order a transcript or find out what must I do to be saved? Go to TheChristianWorldview.org or call toll free 1-888-646 2233. *The Christian Worldview* is a listener-supported non-profit radio ministry furnished by The Overcomer Foundation. To make a donation, become a Christian Worldview Partner, order resources, subscribe to our free newsletter or contact us visit TheChristianWorldview.org or call 1-888-646-2233 or write to Box 401 Excelsior, Minnesota 55331 That's box 401 Excelsior, Minnesota 55331.

Thanks for listening to *The Christian Worldview*.