The Intersection of CHURCH &STATE



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Religious freedom in America has been an issue of paramount importance since the founding of this great nation. As the nation has grown and changed, so has the relationship of the federal government with the many religions that comprise the community of faith throughout the land.

This Bible study examines this vital relationship to see what's working well and how we can improve the rough spots at the intersection of church and state.

For the Study Leader:

Group Discussion:

- Please feel free to move at your own pace through this study; take as much time as you need for each lesson.
- You are welcome to dig in as deep as you want for your personal study, or you might use just the Bible passages and questions included in this discussion guide.
- If you have a limited time for this session, have the guys take a few minutes to look through the session questions and choose as a group those they would most like to discuss.
- We have designed our questions to be open-ended, thus allowing the men in your group the opportunity to share their experiences and unique perspectives.

A downloadable PDF for this study can be found at **<u>lhm.org/ics</u>**.

Using Our Digging Deeper Icons

This is an interactive study guide. We designed it to be flexible, so it will fit both group and personal use. It includes icons that link the user to internet sites where he or she can browse and explore a subject more thoroughly.

We encourage you to look through the Digging Deeper icons to see which ones your group might want to discuss. While you may use the paper discussion guide during your group study, you may want to assign homework for those in the group to check out the various internet sites on their own time. Doing so makes the study much more interactive.

Once you have downloaded the electronic PDF copy of the discussion guide, click on the icons in the text or at the end of the session. When you click on an icon, it will take you to that specific link, which will then open up the corresponding website.

There are only two steps you need to find the Digging Deeper links for this study:

- 1) Visit <u>**lhm.org/ics**</u>.
- 2) On the bottom of this page, click "Additional Resources."

Now you can click the links that interest you and start digging.

To This Discussion Guide User: Because of the changing nature of the internet, occasionally a web link included in a Lutheran Hour Ministries Bible study may change or be deleted altogether by the agency or individual posting it. When you notice an internet link has been modified or has become inoperable, please report this to our Response Center so we can find an alternate site. Thank you.

Please send changes to LHMResponse@lhm.org.



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The Intersection of CHURCH & STATE



SESSION ONE: Is That a Crack in the Wall of Separation?

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for establishing the church and the state. Guide my thoughts about my place in each, that I may serve You by serving my neighbor. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

- What kind of separation should there be between the church and the state?
- What things do you want the government to stay out of?
- What things should the government be involved in?

Watch the Video: Session 1

Jesus taught that both the church and the state are important entities, which God created for our good. But each has its own tasks to perform.

Read Matthew 22:15-22.

- ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle Him in His words.
- ¹⁶ And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and You do not care about anyone's opinion, for You are not swayed by appearances.
- ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"
- ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put Me to the test, you hypocrites?
- ¹⁹ Show Me the coin for the tax." And they brought Him a denarius.
- ²⁰ And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"
- ²¹ They said, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
- ²² When they heard it, they marveled. And they left Him and went away.

- What things do we owe to Caesar (the government) and what things do we owe to God?
- How are the roles of church and state different from each other?
- In what areas do their interests overlap?

Jefferson's "Wall of Separation"

The Danbury Baptists found themselves struggling as a minority religion. They liked what Thomas Jefferson had said about keeping the government out of the church. So when he was elected the third president, they sent a congratulatory letter. It is in Jefferson's reply we find the famous "wall of separation."

- Describe the significance of the Baptist claim that they were enjoying religious privileges as favors granted rather than inalienable rights.
- Why would Jefferson's metaphor of a wall be appropriate in the case of the Danbury Baptists?
- What limitations does the wall metaphor carry?

Learn more about Jefferson's "wall of separation" by clicking here.

High and Impregnable

Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black built Jefferson's metaphor into a high and impregnable wall meant to keep the church out of the state.

• When is it a good idea to keep the church out of the state's God-given business?

- In what areas is it healthy for the church to have influence on the government, especially in a self-governing country like the United States?
- Where might it be beneficial for the state to be able to step into religious affairs?

Putting Jefferson in His Place

Read carefully the full text of the First Amendment:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

- What is the significance of religion being the initial thing addressed in the First Amendment?
- Is it fair to conclude the First Amendment imposes a one-way restriction to prevent the state from interfering with the church, but it was never meant to keep the church from having any impact on the state? Why or why not?
- What difference does it make to refer to the separation of church and state as a "short fence" or a "line in the sand" instead of a "wall"?

Closing Prayer: Lord, You established government as a good institution to protect our lives, possessions and reputations. Give wisdom to our leaders that they may lead us in truth and peace. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Go here to learn more information on our nation's Founding Documents.







SESSION TWO: What Did the Founders Have in Mind?

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, Your Son refused to make Himself an arbiter or judge in civil matters. Teach me why He made such a clear separation between church and state. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

- What benefits would come if the state was run by the church?
- What problems would you anticipate if church and state merged into one?

Watch the Video: Session 2

Let's Not Repeat History

After the birth of Protestantism during the Reformation, long, bloody religious wars were fought throughout Europe and in England.

- What advantages would a people enjoy if their ruler shared their faith?
- What problems would likely arise if he did not?
- What would be attractive about the First Amendment to members of a religious minority?
- What would lead the states to want to ratify this amendment too?

Two Kingdoms Theology

Founding fathers such as James Madison were deeply indebted to Martin Luther's "Two Kingdoms Theology." According to this teaching, God is active in both the realm of the state and the realm of the church. Through the state He brings law and order to society, through His church He brings forgiveness and faith through Jesus Christ His Son.

- Why is it important to remember that God is active in both the church and the state?
- Why is it important for Christians to be active members of both church and state?
- What will happen to our society if Christians stop exerting a healthy influence on it?

Paul wrote to remind the young pastor Titus what things he needed to teach the members of his church:

Read Titus 3:1-8.

- ¹ Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,
- ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.
- ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.
- ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,
- ⁵ He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,
- ⁶ whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,
- ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.
- ⁸ The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.
- What benefits does it bring to society when Christians follow these reminders?
- Describe some of the ways Christians have helped improve your community.

• What other things would you like to do in your community?

America's Conscience

One of the most important roles for religion is to serve as the conscience of our country.

- In what ways do we undermine our democratic values when we fail to bring our morality into public debate?
- What are some issues today that need to be influenced by our religious values?

Closing Prayer: Lord God, thank You for the impact You have made on our lives through Your Son's sacrifice on the cross. Bless our words and actions to have a positive impact in our society and lead others to know of Jesus Christ their Savior. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Explore early American attitudes toward religious freedom.





SESSION THREE: Is America a Christian Nation?

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, it seems natural and reasonable that You would want the United States and every country on earth to be a Christian country. In this session teach us if that is true. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

- Do you think of America as a Christian nation? Why or why not?
- If God's main purpose for any country is to enforce law and order, protect the innocent and punish lawbreakers, what difference would it make if a country was Christian or not?

Watch the Video: Session 3

Is America a Christian Nation?

People have strong opinions on both sides of this question. Some cite the motto on our currency, "In God We Trust," and the words of our Pledge of Allegiance, "one Nation under God," to argue we are. Others argue those terms were incorporated much later in the Civil War and the 1950s. They appeal to the 1797 Treaty of Tripoli to argue that from the start we never considered ourselves a Christian nation: "As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion"

- What pros and cons come out of America's freedom of religion?
- What do you think of President Obama's statement that America is a nation of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, etc.?
- What are some of the most effective ways you have found to witness to neighbors who do not share the Christian faith?

• What do you think would happen if federal, state or local governments got involved in that witness?

In Jesus' day, Rome was fairly tolerant of different religions. It only set itself in opposition to those religions that attacked social values or Roman law. Paul never asked Roman officials to help spread the Christian faith, but as we will see in this reading, he wasn't afraid to use his Roman citizenship to open doors to share the Gospel. After he appealed to stand trial before Caesar, Paul was questioned by a Roman governor named Festus and the great grandson of Herod the Great, King Agrippa II.

Read Acts 26:1-3, 19-32.

- ¹ So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:
- ² "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews,
- ³ especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently."
- ¹⁹ "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,
- ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.
- ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.
- ²² To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass:
- that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, He would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."
- ²⁴ And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind."
- ²⁵ But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words.
- ²⁶ For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.
- ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe."
- ²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"
- ²⁹ and Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains."
- ³⁰ Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them.
- ³¹ And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment."
- ³² And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."
- What role did Paul wish for these Roman officials to fill, as he set out to share the faith?

• How could government authorities best assist religious groups in America?

Christian Mistaken Notions

Most of us may not realize it but the U.S. Supreme Court has often made rulings favorable to Christianity. Still, sometimes it's wiser to keep government separate from church affairs and not involve it in religious matters.

- What risks do we take when we seek government intervention on behalf of religion?
- In what ways would it be better to erect our Christmas manger scenes in our own yard and not fight for the right to have religious symbols displayed on the courthouse lawn?

Closing Prayer: Lord God, when Jesus said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," He distinguished between the spheres of church and state. Give us wisdom to recognize Your purposes for each, that we may live in quietness and share the story of Your Son's salvation in peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Digging Deeper: Additional links and resources available at <u>**lhm.org/ics**</u>.

Learn about several court cases on the subject of church and state separation.







SESSION FOUR: Collision and Cooperation

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, throughout history the paths of church and state have frequently intersected. Govern these intersections that Jesus' story may be spread in peace and harmony and not in conflict and hostility. In Jesus' name. Amen.

- Where do you think conflict is brewing between church and state today?
- What are some areas where both can cooperate to the benefit of society?

Watch the Video: Session 4

Inroads of Secular Darwinism

Our nation's Founding Fathers held a "modern" view of the world; they believed our Creator established absolute standards of right and wrong which apply to all His creatures. So the Constitution and Bill of Rights are based on the proposition that we are all endowed with inalienable rights by our Creator. This idea of absolute standards of right and wrong continued down to the generation of the baby boomers.

But since then, a post-modern worldview has taken hold. As secular Darwinism pushed aside the Creator, it replaced the solid ground of absolute standards of right and wrong with the shifting and unreliable ground of individual concepts of right and wrong.

- What would this new world view say about the inalienable rights that underlie our Constitution?
- As more legislators and judges adopt a post-modern world view, what do you think will happen to the traditional understanding of the relationship between church and state?

• As universal, final truth is replaced by individual preference and choice, what new challenges do Christians face in the United States?

Founding Fathers—Are They Relevant Anymore?

The view of the Founding Fathers was largely shaped by natural law. But as Darwinism has undermined this law, the relevance of the Founding Fathers comes under question.

- How relevant do you think the Founding Fathers' views are today? Should they be binding on us? Why or why not?
- Should we see the Constitution as an unchangeable document or as a flexible document, which needs to be adapted to a changing nation living in changing times?
- What things should inform our public moral law? Which should not?

Our Faith and the Government

There has been a lot of debate recently in the United States as to whether the federal government should be involved in meeting social needs, or if that effort should stay with churches, local charities and local governments.

- What advantages do local groups have over the federal government in meeting local needs?
- What resources might the federal government offer that local groups or governments cannot?
- Do you think conflicts between the government and churches have created suspicion that interferes with the healthy collaboration between church and state?
 - What solutions can you see?

Useful Intersections

The church has much to offer the citizens of our nation. Paul pointed that out to the Christians living in Corinth.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.

- ¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia,
- ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.
- ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,
- ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—
- ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.
- ⁶ Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.
- ⁷ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.
- ⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.
- ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.
- ¹⁰ And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it.
- ¹¹ So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.
- ¹² For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.
- ¹³ For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness
- ¹⁴ your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.
- ¹⁵ As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."
- This Macedonian offering was intended for Christians facing hard times in the land of Israel. Is it selfish to raise funds that are targeted for churches and affected Christians in disaster areas rather than general funds to help everyone? Why or why not?
- What are some opportunities you have to help improve life in your community?
- What needs can your church or group help meet in your community?

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for making Yourself poor that we might be made rich. Give us the love, strength and means to reach out to those in need to glorify Your Name. Amen.

Digging Deeper: Additional links and resources available at <u>lhm.org/ics.</u>

Find out some of the many things the church has to offer citizens.

How religious is America today?

About the Host

The Rev. Dr. Gregory P. Seltz is the Speaker of **The Lutheran Hour**^{*} radio program. As host of *The Intersection of Church & State*, Seltz assists viewers in understanding the multi-layered discourse existing between church and state in the U.S. He is conversant with the dynamics underlying church-state relations in this country—and how this relationship can be a fruitful force for good to those in need.



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