

The God Who Laughs

*When the State Reaches for the Church — and the Church That
Will Not Bow*

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Updated 2026-07-20

Contents

Contents	2
1 Whose Church Is It?	3
2 Caesar's Coin, God's Image	4
3 When the Decree Comes	6
4 Registration and the All-Seeing Eye	8
5 Rewriting the Book	10
6 The Imprisoned Shepherds	12
7 Not Only There	14
8 Obey God Rather Than Men	15

Chapter 1

Whose Church Is It?

Every fight over the church begins with one question of ownership: whose church is it? Get that wrong and everything downstream goes wrong.

Jesus answered it Himself, and He left no room to negotiate.

Matthew 16:18 · And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

My church. Not Peter's. Not Rome's. Not the emperor's, the parliament's, or the party's. Christ calls the church His own possession, and He builds it with His own hands. A thing you did not build and cannot build is not yours to govern.

Paul says the same thing with a different picture. The church is a body, and a body has one head.

Colossians 1:18 · And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

One head. A body with two heads is a monster, not a living thing. When the state reaches in to steer doctrine, to license the preacher, to edit the message, it is not helping the body — it is trying to bolt a second head onto it. The body of Christ already has a Head, and He is not resigning.

Ephesians 1:22 · And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,

Read that carefully. The Father put *all things* under Christ's feet — every throne, every senate, every ministry of religious affairs — and *then* gave Him as head to the church. The state is under His feet. It does not get to stand over His bride. When a government sets itself above the church, it has reversed the order God fixed in heaven.

So before we say a word about taxes, obedience, or law, the ground is already settled. The church is not the state's to run, because it was never the state's to begin with. It is His.

Chapter 2

Caesar's Coin, God's Image

The most misused verse in this whole debate is one sentence from Jesus, and people quote half of it. They stop at "render unto Caesar." Jesus did not stop there.

Matthew 22:21 · They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

Look at how the trap was set. They held up a coin. Whose image is on it? Caesar's. Then give it back to him — it carries his likeness, it belongs to his sphere. Taxes, coins, roads, the ordering of civil life: render it, and render it gladly.

But Jesus pressed a second question into the first. If the coin bears Caesar's image and so belongs to Caesar, then what bears God's image? You do. The worshipper does. The conscience does. The church does. And *that* you render to God. Caesar may have your coin. He may not have your soul, your worship, or Christ's bride.

Now to the verse the other side always reaches for. Paul does command the Christian to submit to governing authority, and we will not dodge it.

Romans 13:1-4 · Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

This is real, and it binds. God ordains the state. The Christian is not an anarchist; he pays his taxes, keeps the law, honours the officer. But read what the state is *for*. It bears the sword against evildoers. It is a terror to bad works, a minister of God for good. Paul hands the state the sword; he does not hand it the pulpit.

That word — *minister* — is the whole point. A minister is a servant, and a servant can obey or disobey. A teacher at [Reclaiming Dominion](#) reads the chapter rightly: Romans 13 is not a blank cheque handed to the state, it is a leash. It fences the government to a few plain tasks — punish the evildoer, protect the innocent, uphold justice. Step outside them and the same God who ordained the office judges the man who holds it.

Scripture even names the overreach. When a government starts calling the church's good evil and the world's evil good, heaven has a word for it.

Isaiah 5:20 · Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

That is not a note on a badly run department. It is a woe — a curse. A state that brands the gospel as hatred and licenses what God forbids is not merely inconvenient; it has crossed from its lane into God's, and it stands under that woe.

So what do we pray for such rulers? Paul is specific — and again, most of us quote only the first half of him.

First Timothy 2:1-4 · I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Notice what we are told to ask for. Not that the king would run the church well — that he would leave it alone. A quiet and peaceable life, in godliness and honesty. And notice *why*: because God "will have all men to be saved." The point of a bounded government is a free gospel. Dr. Aaron B. Campbell, who spent years defending small churches and Bible colleges from state licensing, draws the same line in [Why Christians Must Defend Religious Freedom](#): we do not pray merely for a ruler's health — we pray that he would grasp the limits of his own office and let the people of God get on with the work. Get the state out of the pulpit, and the gospel runs free.

Honour the state in its lane. Refuse it the moment it leaves that lane and reaches for God's.

Chapter 3

When the Decree Comes

Scripture is not naive about the state. It shows you, again and again, the moment the decree comes — the point where earthly power stops serving God and starts trying to replace Him — and it shows you men who would not bend.

It began early. Israel wanted a king like the nations, a strong human government to rule over them. Samuel took it as a rejection of himself. God corrected him: the rejection went higher.

First Samuel 8:6-7 · But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

There is the ancient temptation laid bare — to crown a human power in the place that belongs to God alone. Every state that demands the church's ultimate allegiance is asking for a throne that was never on offer.

And heaven's answer to that overreach never changes.

Psalms 2:1-4 · Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

The kings take their counsel. God laughs. Not because the threat is small to those who suffer it, but because the outcome is not in doubt. No parliament outvotes the One who sits in the heavens.

Then the decree lands on real men. Nebuchadnezzar built an image and commanded every knee to bow. Three Hebrews would not. Hear how they answered a king who held their lives in his hand.

Daniel 3:16-18 · Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

But if not. There is the hinge of all faithful resistance. They did not obey because they expected rescue; they obeyed whether rescue came or not. The state can compel the body into the furnace. It cannot compel the worship of the heart.

Daniel drew the same line, and drew it quietly. A law was signed forbidding prayer to anyone but the king. Daniel did not riot. He simply kept praying, out loud, at the open window, as he had always done.

Daniel 6:10 · Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

Notice what faithful defiance looks like. No sword drawn, no coup, no hatred of the king. Just an open window and a bent knee where the law forbade one. When the state trespasses into the place of God, the church does not answer with rage. It answers with a worship the decree cannot reach.

Chapter 4

Registration and the All-Seeing Eye

The decree is not a museum piece. It is being written again, now, in this generation — only the tablet is digital.

In one province of China the state has built an app. Before a believer may attend a religious service, he must register on it: his name, his address, his identity papers, all handed to the government, and then he must wait for approval to go and worship. When officials walk into a service, they tell the congregation to take out their phones and open the app — and anyone who did not sign up beforehand is exposed. Todd Nettleton of Voice of the Martyrs described it bluntly: you are being required to paint a target on your chest before you are allowed to pray. [Chinese Communists Forcing Registration on Religion](#) The same machinery China built to track its people during the pandemic — no green check, no entry — has now been pointed at the church door.

Where the app ends, the camera begins. Bob Fu of China Aid reports that registered churches are ordered to mount facial-recognition cameras in all four corners of the building, the pulpit included, so that every face in the pew is logged. [Face Recognition Cameras in Churches](#) Even the offering has been criminalized: put a tithing box in a house church and the pastor can be arrested, the gift reclassified as an illegal service. And in the state-approved churches the congregation must rise and sing the Communist anthem — the praises of the party's heroes — before they are permitted to sing to Christ.

Read the old book and you will not be surprised. John saw a power that wanted exactly this: total registration, and no ordinary life left for anyone who would not submit to it.

Revelation 13:16-17 · And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

I am not saying an app is the mark of the beast; that sensational reading has embarrassed the church too many times. I am saying the *appetite* is the same one Scripture named long ago — the craving of earthly power to be seen by all, obeyed by all, and to lock the disobedient out of ordinary life. A camera in the rafters of a sanctuary is that ancient appetite wearing a lens.

And the answer is the same as it always was. Daniel knew the writing was signed, and he did not close his window. He knelt where the law could see him and prayed as he had always done. The believers of China are answering in exactly that key: they know the camera is watching, and they worship anyway. A surveillance state can log a face. It cannot arrest a heart that has already settled whom it will serve.

Chapter 5

Rewriting the Book

A registration app controls who may come to church. A camera records who did. But there is a colder ambition still, and China has announced it openly: to change the book itself.

President Xi Jinping has called for the "Sinicization" of religion — in his own words, guiding the faiths so that "religion and socialism co-exist." Jeff Kloha of the Museum of the Bible, interviewed on [How the Communist Party Plans to Rewrite the Bible](#), describes a ten-year state project, tracing back to party guidance from 2017, to re-annotate and reinterpret Scripture along party lines. It has already surfaced in smaller edits: a schoolbook that retells the story of the woman caught in adultery so that Jesus himself throws the stone; provinces where the Ten Commandments have been quietly rewritten. As Kloha put it, an authoritarian government "does not like alternative authorities" — and the Bible is the oldest alternative authority there is. To rule a conscience absolutely, you must first silence the book that judges you.

It is an old scheme, and it has never once worked. Kings have burned scrolls, banned translations, and edited God into their own image since there were kings. Here is what they keep running into.

Isaiah 40:8 · The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

Governments wither. The word does not. A party may print a doctored gospel; it cannot un-write the true one from the millions of Bibles already in the country, and it cannot reach the place where God keeps His real copy.

Jeremiah 31:33 · But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

That is the archive no censor can raid. When God writes His law on the inward parts, there is no press to seize, no server to wipe, no page to tear out. You would have to cut it out of the heart of every believer at once — and the moment you make a martyr, you have only proved the book true.

Paul knew the feeling of a state that thought it could silence the message by chaining the messenger. He wrote this with iron on his own wrists.

Second Timothy 2:9 · Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.

Chain Paul; the word walks free. Edit the page; the truth is already loose in ten thousand hearts. A government can rewrite its own copy of the Bible. It cannot rewrite God's.

Chapter 6

The Imprisoned Shepherds

Behind every decree there is a face. It helps to say their names.

Since last October, Pastor Ezra Jin has sat in a Chinese prison. He founded Beijing's Zion Church — one of the largest house-church networks in the country, more than a hundred congregations across some forty cities, reaching many thousands of believers. That reach was his crime. Within twenty-four hours the Communist Party rounded up dozens of its leaders across nine provinces. Bob Fu of China Aid called it a milestone in the state's war on the church. [The CCP's War Against Christianity in China](#) Jin's daughter, Grace Drexel, said the only thing a daughter can say: "I just want my father back." [Faith Under Fire — China's Crackdown on Christians](#)

He is not alone in that cell block of the faithful. Pastor Wang Yi of the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu is serving nine years, sentenced in 2020 after he preached a sermon on John 3:16, publicly calling the nation's president to repent and receive Christ. The state called it "instigating the subversion of state power." Fu says Wang Yi told his family he keeps more than a hundred thousand prayer requests in prison, and prays there for America and for the free world. Others of his flock drew fourteen and twelve years for one refusal: they would not take the cross down off their church roof.

Sam Brownback, the former United States ambassador for religious freedom, watches it widening — "they're arresting Sunday school organizers." The state permits only the churches it runs itself; a congregation it cannot script, it will not allow. And once a pastor is charged, the outcome is all but fixed — a conviction rate that leaves a family almost nothing to hope for in the courtroom. [Faith Under Fire — China's Crackdown on Christians](#)

So why do they not simply comply? Because their Lord drew the fear-line for them long ago, and put it somewhere the state cannot reach.

Matthew 10:28 · And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

A government's whole leverage is the body — the cell, the fine, the frozen account, the child kept out of school. Jesus does not pretend those are nothing; He says they are

not final. The man who fears God has run out of things the state can threaten him with. That is why a pastor can lose nine years and go on preaching from inside the walls.

And here is the irony the party cannot solve. The prison is not shrinking the church; it is spreading it.

Philippians 1:12-14 · But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Paul wrote that from custody, and it has been coming true in China for decades: more persecution, more church. The chains meant to silence the gospel became its megaphone. You cannot jail your way out of a movement whose founder walked out of His own tomb.

Chapter 7

Not Only There

It would be comforting to think this is a problem of distant tyrannies — that cameras in sanctuaries and edited Bibles belong to a far country and a strange flag. They do not. The reach into the conscience wears a democratic suit too.

In Britain, Adam Smith Connor — an army veteran, a physiotherapist — stood about fifty metres from an abortion clinic and prayed silently for three minutes. He obstructed no one, spoke to no one, held no sign. A police officer approached and asked him the strangest question a free country has asked in a long time: "What is the nature of your prayer today?" He answered honestly — he was praying for his son, lost to an abortion years before. For that, he was convicted. [Persecution in the UK](#)

Read that again. Not for blocking a door. Not for shouting anyone down. For the *contents of his mind*. The new buffer-zone law forbids anything that might "influence" a person within a wide radius of a clinic — a word so elastic it has reportedly reached a woman tried for holding a sign that read only, "Here to talk if you want," and, in Scotland, warnings that a citizen might break the law by praying at the window of his own home. The state has walked past the deeds of the body and put a man on trial for the prayers of his heart.

That is precisely the border Scripture forbids the state to cross. Caesar was handed the sword, to punish what the hand does. He was never handed the heart. When a government criminalizes silent prayer, it is not policing an act; it is claiming the one territory God kept for Himself.

And the faithful answer is old and quiet. Daniel's window was open when the law said to shut it. Adam Smith Connor kept praying when the law said the prayer itself was the crime. This is the very thing we were told to pray we might be spared — a life no longer "quiet and peaceable," where godliness itself is charged in a courtroom. The free West is not exempt from that prayer. It needs it now as much as anyone.

Chapter 8

Obey God Rather Than Men

The pattern of the Old Testament becomes the plain rule of the New. The church was born under a government that ordered it to be silent, and on the first day the apostles told that government no.

The council arrested Peter and John and handed down its decree: stop preaching this name.

Acts 4:18-20 · And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

They did not question the court's authority to govern. They questioned its authority to silence God. "Judge ye" — decide for yourselves whether we should obey you over Him. It was not a hard call, and they made it in the open.

Dragged back a second time, they said it plainer, and it has been the church's charter ever since.

Acts 5:29 · Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Not *we may*. *We ought*. When the command of the state and the command of God finally cross, obedience to God is not the rebellious option — it is the only faithful one. The apostle who wrote "be subject unto the higher powers" is the same Peter who told the higher powers no. There is no contradiction. Submit to the state in its lane; obey God when it leaves it.

So hear the charge, wherever you read this.

If your government makes you register to worship and films your face at the pulpit, remember Daniel's open window — and that Christ never asked the state's permission to build His church.

If it jails the pastor for preaching and calls the gospel "subversion," remember that Peter preached the forbidden name to the very court that forbade it, and that Paul's chains only made the brethren bolder.

If it rewrites the Scripture to flatter its ideology, remember that the word of our God shall stand for ever — and that He has already filed His copy where no censor can reach it.

And if it puts a man on trial for the prayers of his own heart, remember that the heart was never Caesar's to police. It bears God's image. Render it to God.

The church is not the state's. It is Christ's. Give Caesar his coin. Give God what bears His image — your worship, your conscience, and the bride His Son died to make His own. And when the two ever collide, you already know the line.

We ought to obey God rather than men.

How this was made

This is the author's own work. It was composed with [junifye](#) and an AI assistant, drawing its Scripture and original-language work (Greek, Hebrew, cross-references) from [Darash](#) (Hebrew *darash*, “to seek, inquire, study”), a tool and reference work for the Bible in its original languages.

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