

A Major Battle on Three Fronts

by Rev. Tom Aicken

The biblical teaching of sphere sovereignty demands careful understanding, and at no time in recent history has such clarity of thought on this subject been more important than it is today in the rapidly changing world we see all around us. If as Christians we want to preserve communities from the evils of globalism, socialist elitism, political tyranny, judicial corruption, postmodernism, woke mythology, cancel culture, critical race theory, transgenderism, the sexualizing of children, a growing paganism, and a diminishing morality which comes of denying the supremacy of God and the rule of law – plus whatever other weapons Satan is using to attack the Church, to destroy her witness to and influence on the world about us – we have to see and learn to appreciate the structure of authority that God Himself has established for the wellbeing of society.

What, then, is sphere sovereignty, and what does the Bible teach us about it? It is the fact that God has given all authority and power to His own dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:35), has done so for the sake of His Church (Eph. 1:2), which headship, in turn, makes Him King of kings and Lord over all (Rev. 17:14). We are all, therefore, ultimately accountable to Him. Moreover, Christ has committed certain temporal powers to particular authorities He has established on earth – namely, the church, the family and the state – and the exercise of these temporal powers is to operate in a manner that is consistent with His own rule of law.

Some of the powers of the church are preaching the gospel, the administration of the sacraments and church discipline; of the family are child education, moral development and discipline; and of the state are criminal law, a fair and impartial system of justice, and national defence. Each authority is responsible for its own appointed sphere of power and may not encroach upon the sphere of any other authority. Hence, the name “sphere sovereignty.” No family, for example, is to interfere with or dismiss the work of either church or state; no state is to dictate when the church may or may not meet; and no church is to overreach itself by meddling in the proper affairs of the family. Each is to respect the field of labour appointed to the others (Matt. 28: 18-20; Rom. 13:1-7; Eph. 5:22-6:9), and each is to resist those authorities when they overstep those set boundaries (Acts 5:29).

We may be familiar with the teaching of Eph. 6:10-20, which is about the Christian putting on the whole armour of God in order to stand against the wiles of the devil. For the believer who is not familiar with it, please read it again and study it carefully. There we read of truth and righteousness, of being ready for battle and prepared to move quickly; we also read of faith, of the protection that salvation gives, and of the power of the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Each piece of the armour is to be worn with unceasing prayer to the end that we might fight the good fight of faith with boldness.

This is a wonderful passage, insightful and encouraging, regarding the spiritual battle the Christian is called to fight as he continues his journey through this valley of the shadow of death. There are two things, however, which are too often overlooked in the study of this Scripture: (1) The believer's enemies are not only Satan and the individual's own indwelling sin, but the world as well. Satan uses the world and its ways as a powerful instrument to take God's people down; and (2) The believer does not fight this battle alone, but is equipped to fight it with other believers, and to do so that they might be of help to one another. Why else, for instance, would we be instructed to pray for all the saints engaged in combat, and for our ambassadors (pastors) who declare the mystery of the gospel?

Keeping these two points in mind – the world and our collective fight against it – how best might believers join forces to stand effectively against the ways of the world which can be so overwhelming and beguiling? The answer, I submit, is to be found, not in the schemes and programs of men which come to nothing, but in God's own way of doing things, in supporting the sovereign spheres which Christ Himself has appointed to serve Him, namely, the church, family and state. This is where I need to be very specific, and, while this subject could be pursued at much greater length and depth, let me offer at least a brief overview of a battle plan which every true Christian (regardless of his theological leaning) should be able to support with principled commitment.

The first front of battle: the Church. The Church is commissioned to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Preaching is the means by which the Lord draws men to Himself and makes them His own (Rom. 10:14-17). Let us pray for pastors, therefore, that they may be bold to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), focusing on Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor.

2:2), and that it may be mixed with faith in those who hear it (Heb. 4:2). Liberal churches have moved away from the offence of the cross; neo-orthodox churches have drained it of all meaning; prosperity churches have turned it into another gospel, which is no gospel at all; and seeker-friendly churches have watered this message down to little more than entertainment. Let us get back to praying for those who proclaim the cross of Christ faithfully, as offensive as it may be to some and foolishness to others, knowing that this very message is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (1 Cor. 1:18).

Let us also set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts, devoting ourselves completely to Him, always ready to give a defence to anyone and everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is within us, doing so with meekness (out of respect for our neighbour) and with godly fear (out of reverence for the Lord Himself). See 1 Pet. 3:15. Who will ask us about our hope? Those unbelievers who have witnessed it, who have seen the joy and peace it gives us even when we are sorely tested and tried. This is a powerful testimony to the life transforming power of the gospel!

The second front of battle: the family. The family is the training ground for children, the unit under parental care where children are to be raised in the instruction and discipline of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Christian parents may take advantage of the public school system if they find it to be adequate and consistent with their own values, but today that is certainly not the case, and so it is that they need to search out other options for their offspring. Parents need to be careful, too, regarding “Christian” schools which prove to be Christian in name only. If they find a Christian school which is actually Bible-based, a school where they can send their children with confidence, that is a rich blessing in itself and one for which to be very thankful. Apart from that, they may have to participate in the creation of such a school, or go in with a few other families and hire a teacher, or even begin their own homeschool using a room in their house.

The point in all this is that we have come to such a threshold in society that we can no longer entertain reasonable expectations of fixing our culture and restoring the moral standards that were widely regarded as sacrosanct just a few decades ago. Christians now need to develop what they deem to be appropriate sub-cultures with other like-minded parents, and a good place to start may be within their own church. Many parents are still not on board with this. Countless

petitions, protests and podcasts put out by right-wing organizations would lead them to believe otherwise, but there comes a point when we have to realize and publicly acknowledge that losing the cultural skirmish is not the end of the war but only a means of entering a new and better door for effective service. Parents, dare to be innovative. Your children are worth it, and you never know how your own good example and ingenuity may inspire other parents like you.

The third front of battle: the state. In any democracy the political party which wins the election becomes the ruling government until the next election. In evil times like ours, however, it is imperative for Christian voters not to aim too high, only to lose everything in doing so. Let us vote, rather, for what is achievable, for a political party which is not necessarily our ideal but has a realistic opportunity of winning the election and ousting any other party which is determined to destroy the country. Even if our party wins, mind you, it does not mean that we should stop there and simply assume that everything will go well from then on. No, let us press on and seek the next achievable goal, which means contacting our new leaders and impressing upon them the need for some improved policies and possibly even trying to get them to address a few issues which they would never consider on their own. Another step, if they are responsive, would be to contact them again, this time with a few words of encouragement. Some believers may even wish to run in the next election themselves!

The whole point here is to strive, step by step, for what is achievable and to keep forging ahead however long it takes. Just voting for the political party with the best policies, but with no prospect of winning an election, makes no sense. Even worse, it gives any government that you may not want, especially in these perilous times, greater opportunity to maintain power. The future is too important for that, and we must face it, when we lose our freedoms we have no reasonable hope of ever getting them back.

Whatever the election results, though, let us always pray for our leaders in government, both good and bad, and let us respect the office which has been appointed of the Lord for our wellbeing (1 Tim. 2:1,2). If we resist those in authority when they have done nothing wrong, nor required us to do wrong, be well aware that we have resisted the ordinance of God Himself (Rom. 13:2), and let us give no place to that.