

We Don't Impose, We Propose – How Christians Should Relate to the Culture

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul promised that he would show them a “more excellent way” (I Corinthians 12:31). And he did so in the very next passage, Chapter 13, the famous chapter on Love. Three centuries later Ambrose, in commenting about other aspects of Paul’s teaching (on singleness vs. marriage), concluded by saying “it is not imposed but proposed.” Doesn’t that describe our most impactful entreaty to the world today? We don’t impose on the world, but instead we propose a more excellent way in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet many Christians are as apprehensive about the future as the rest of the culture, even though Scripture clearly teaches us to “have no anxiety about anything” (Philippians 4:6). As the temptation toward fear and anxiety about the future overwhelms us, how do we propose a more excellent way for the culture that is longing for something positive? How can we be salt and light to our cultural context?

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I. In his public ministry, Jesus corrected that which had become unrecognizable from God’s original plan

Real purpose of the Sabbath	Mark 2:23-28
Real meaning of obedience	Mark 7:1-13
Real design of marriage	Mark 10: 2-9
Real role of children	Mark 10:13-16
Real sense of reverence	Mark 11: 15-17

II. “Render Unto Caesar” was a dramatic example of this correction

This came in the context of three Roman taxes at the time — ground tax, income tax and poll tax

Jesus’ correction was provocative and illuminating. Mark 12:13-17

Lord Acton in 1877 summed it up this way:

“But when Christ said: ‘Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s,’ those words ... gave to the civil power, under the protection of conscience, a sacredness it had never enjoyed, and bounds it had never acknowledged; and they were the repudiation of absolutism and the inauguration of Freedom.”

III. We find ourselves in a trilateral framework

Government is ordained by God.
Christians are called to be active in it.
Its scope is limited.

IV. Public confidence in governmental systems in breaking down

Instant gratification culture
High expectations
Zero sum game politics: “You win, I lose”
Doesn’t anyone get along?

V. It’s tempting to give up but we are admonished against this

Paul asserted his Roman citizenship against scourging	Acts 22:25
Paul used a “wedge issue” to divide his critics	Acts 23:6
Paul appealed to Caesar	Acts 25:11

VI. So what is the best way forward for us?

“And I will show you a still more excellent way.”	1 Corinthians 12:31
“... give an account for the hope that is within you ...”	1 Peter 3:15

“When Nothing’s Sacred” by Billy Sprague

People need true love but chase infatuation,
they need a hope but live on short supply.
People need wisdom but get more education,
people need forgiveness but settle things eye for eye.

People need identity but are satisfied with titles,
they need true courage but bravado looks sincere.
People need a Living God but seem content with idols,
they need destinies but settle for careers.

And the soul remains unsettled,
And the world a wilderness,
And a time when nothing’s sacred,
And souls settle for less.

People need faith but place their bets on science,
they need a refuge but stay out in the rain.
People need each other but rely on self-reliance,
People need a Christmas but settle for a holiday.

People need dignity but survive on ego,
People need the Truth but will take an alibi,
People need a Savior but much prefer a hero,
Most long for heaven but have settled for the sky.

And the soul remains unsettled,
And the world a wilderness,
And a time when nothing’s sacred,
And souls settle for less.