



**Issues, Etc.**<sup>TM</sup>  
*Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio*

## TRANSCRIPT

*Rev. Todd Wilken, Host*

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# "Christian Vocation, Part 2: Civil Authorities & Citizens"

**Guest:**

**Pastor Peter Bender**

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**WILKEN:** For some reason, Christians today, especially in America, have a real tension – an unnecessary tension, I think – between what they think the Christian faith requires of them and what they think the government requires of them. Is the government a necessary evil? That's how a lot of Christians think about even the best of governments. But that is not the way St. Paul thought about government, and he was living under one of the worst of history's governments ever, especially if you were a

Christian. He thought of it as a good, and he thought about it as ordained by God. Now, he's only picking up on what Jesus Himself said about government, how He acted under government. We're going to talk about that in part two of our five-part series on Christian Vocation today: civil government and the government's citizens.

Joining us on this Wednesday afternoon, December the 28<sup>th</sup>, Pastor Peter Bender. He's pastor of Peace Lutheran Church and

Director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy in Sussex, Wisconsin. Pastor Bender, welcome back.

**BENDER:** Good afternoon, Todd, and once again, a hearty Merry Christmas to you, since we're in Christmastide still.

**WILKEN:** And to you as well.

So I guess the bottom line question has to be: how did Jesus regard civil government?

**BENDER:** When the Pharisees came to Him and asked Him if it was lawful to pay taxes or not, attempting to trap Him – for they had no loyalty themselves to the civil government that was over them and wanted to overthrow it – He asked for the tax money to be given to Him, then asked “Who’s inscription is on it?” And, “Why, Caesar’s.” To which He responded, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” And what we as Christians owe to God, more than anything else, is simply faith that trusts ourselves and everything to Him. And Jesus affirmed throughout the Gospels that the authorities that exist have been established by God – something that St. Paul echoed, as you mentioned at the onset of the program, in Romans 13:1. Before Pontius Pilate – when Pilate told Jesus, “You’re not speaking to me. Don’t you realize I have power to release you or power to crucify you?” And He says, “You could have no power at all against me unless it had been given you from above. In those words, Jesus informs us that the very authority of the civil ruler, Pontius Pilate, that issued the sentence that Jesus would be crucified, came from God. And that Pilate, as a civil authority, was acting under God’s authority. Even though he had no faith in Christ, even though he did not believe in Him, it was still an authority, and an office that he was exercising by divine right. And that’s part of why the historic apostles and Nicene Creed speaks of Jesus being crucified “under Pontius Pilate.” They might just as well have

said, “Jesus was crucified under God,” for Pilate spoke on God’s behalf.

**WILKEN:** Then let’s talk about some of the basic Bible passages that guide real Christian thinking – not what has become Christian thinking, which is “government is a necessary evil” – but the real Christian Bible passages that guide Christians’ minds when it comes to civil government. Where do you begin?

**BENDER:** Well, I had mentioned a couple of those in the Gospels: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” and Jesus before Pilate in John 19. In Martin Luther’s collection of texts in what we call the Table of Duties in his *Small Catechism*, under Civil Government he cites Paul’s famous words in Romans 13:1-4, 5-7, where Paul says, “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities” – every Christian – “for there is no authority except that which God has established.” And fundamentally, that becomes a call from God to trust in Him. Few people have to be instructed to submit and obey and honor civil authorities when they love the civil authorities, or when they agree with them, just like a child doesn’t need to be told to honor and love their parents when their parents are taking them out for custard and giving them the toys and goodies that they want most of all. It’s when the civil authority or the parent does something or acts in a way which conflicts with what we think is good and right. That’s where the call to submission is really a call to trust God – that He will do you good, even through that which appears to be evil. And that’s why it takes us always back to the cross, and to Christ’s crucifixion under Pontius Pilate. There was no single disciple or follower of Jesus during that Holy Week and as the events of Good Friday unfolded – no one believed except Jesus that that suffering and that sentence of death under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate was good. But it was the greatest

good, through which God in that act accomplished salvation for the world.

**WILKEN:** So this really is – we think of it under the Fourth Commandment: honor father and mother, which we’ll talk about a little bit later.

**BENDER:** That’s right.

**WILKEN:** But you say this really is a First Commandment issue, though.

**BENDER:** Absolutely. And so in those succeeding verses in Romans 13:2, “He who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and therefore is rebelling against God.” It’s fundamentally a faith issue. We fear, love, and trust in God above all things. That’s what we’re called to under the First Commandment. And that means that when He establishes civil authority, and even allows wicked governments to exist and wreak havoc in the world, that this becomes an occasion for us to trust God, to pray, to engage in acts of mercy, to participate in the civil authority, to be civil government citizens and so forth – but to do it in a way that is uniquely and fundamentally Christian, as Jesus did. He lived by faith in the grace of God, in the mercy of God, and that’s the life to which we are called to as His disciples. And so in our own country, while we may be given such things as freedom of speech and the right to peaceably assemble, that doesn’t mean Christians are given the right to say anything that they please. Our speech is always to be seasoned with salt, and the good that we engage in as citizens is always to be for the benefit of the neighbor and the honor of Christ our Lord, in whom we trust. And if you think about how Jesus conducted Himself before Herod and before Pontius Pilate, it was with the utmost respect, the utmost honor. Now, He didn’t disobey His heavenly Father. He didn’t sin against God’s Word. But He did submit to the authorities,

and He honored them and He respected them.

**WILKEN:** Now, how would you explain the rise of this notion among Christians – and I think it’s, in particular, Christians in the United States – many who believe, contrary to what you’ve been saying here based upon Jesus’ behavior and example, Paul’s clear word, that government, even the best of governments, is a necessary evil. How would you explain the rise of that notion?

**BENDER:** I think it has a faulty view of the problem of sin and why it is that God instituted government in the first place. And why God gave the Law. When humanity fell into sin, the Law became necessary in order to expose the sin, to call us to repentance. And the rule of Law, in a spiritual sense – when the Church makes use of the Law, it is to expose sin and unbelief and to drive us to Christ, that we might receive the forgiveness of sins for Jesus’ sake. But the Law has a function also, if you look throughout Scripture – because of the problem of sin and humanity’s corruption – to curb the gross outbreaks of sin and to protect the law-abiding citizen, to reward those who do well and to punish those who do wrong. So far from a necessary evil – it is actually something that Christians are called to believe in is good, just as the Law is good. Now, when the Law accuses me because of my sin, it hurts me and it becomes a condemning word. But the Law in and of itself from God is good. And since the authorities are established under the Fourth Commandment by God, then by definition they are good. And I suppose one could think about what would happen if a society completely lost its government and lost the rule of law, the kind of chaos that would ensue. And we’ve seen that from time to time in our own country, in other countries: pillaging, looting, all manner of evil – unrestrained, unbridled sin. So we as Christians, because we trust in the goodness of God, trust when He says in His

Word the authorities that exist have been established by God. This is part of God's goodness. And ultimately, Todd, the authorities that exist are not about the ultimate goal being a super-duper kingdom on Earth in the sense of a human civil government, but ultimately for the sake of the Church and the proclamation of the Gospel and the cause of faith.

**WILKEN:** Now, I want to talk about that when we come back from the break, because it kind of brings us back around to the First Commandment and the First Article of the Apostles' Creed. Everything God gives, including – and then Luther has in that laundry list of these good gifts that God has granted to us good government. Everything that God gives in this world is for the sake of His Christ, and for the sake of His Church.

Pastor Peter Bender is our guest.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* Pastor Peter Bender is our guest. Part two of a five-part series on Christian Vocation today: civil government and we as citizens. I'm Todd Wilken.

Pastor Bender, you said something before the break that I think is often forgotten, and that is: what God gives by way of all of His great gifts, for this body and life, and including good government, is given for the sake of Christ and for the sake of Christ's Church. Pick up on that, if you would.

**BENDER:** That's right, Todd. And it includes, most especially, the opportunities for us under hardship, duress, persecution, to confess the name of Christ and to confess the Gospel of God's love and mercy in Jesus. One of the things that I want to harp on throughout this series is that Christian vocation is all about receiving the forgiveness of sins that we do not deserve. It's all about receiving Christ and His grace,

which is not merited. And to live under the Law means that we will only honor and obey those who are worthy of being honored and obeyed. But for us as Christians, we have a different calling. The Gospel calls us to honor a father or a mother who may abuse us, even, and to pray for them and for their salvation because we believe in the grace of God. We didn't earn our salvation. We didn't earn our forgiveness. It was a free gift of God's love in Jesus. And that shapes, fundamentally, the way in which we then live towards parents and towards the civil rulers. And Pontius Pilate and Caiaphas the High Priest, who had some civil authority at the time of Jesus, and Herod – these people did not merit the honor that Jesus gave them. But Jesus trusted in the Father's love, and the Father's love for the salvation of the world. That's why He was willing to shoulder the full burden of our sin upon the cross and to submit to those authorities. And so when we as Christians honor the civil authorities and submit to them, we are saying something about the Lord whom we trust in, and something about His grace. And I think this is what Jesus is talking about in the Sermon on the Mount, when he says of His Church, "You are the salt of the earth, the light of the world," and, "Let your light so shine before men." It's "let the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ come forth in your lives." And that's why He goes on in that Sermon on the Mount to say, "Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who hate you," and so forth. "Pray for those who spitefully use you and abuse you." Because that's what Jesus did for us. We didn't deserve it at all and He did it all freely. And that gives a powerful testimony – the difference and the uniqueness of what it is to live as a Christian with faith in Christ.

Now, I didn't finish the answer to your question about the civil authorities for the sake of the Church. But I wanted to focus on the Christian's honor and obedience to

the undeserving civil authority and why that is given.

**WILKEN:** And it seems like you're saying that it is especially important for Christians to remember this with regard to government, when government isn't good.

**BENDER:** Exactly. And when we participate – here in Wisconsin we've got all kinds of protests going on this year, and we have a recall petition being circulated, and there are all kinds of rancorous behavior and rhetoric that's going on. And Christians are never to participate in that. That doesn't mean they don't participate in the government as free citizens, especially in our democratic republic, where we are given the right of free speech. But our free speech is seasoned with the salt of God's mercy and love, and always to be spoken for the benefit of the neighbor – our fellow citizen – and in honor of the authorities God has placed over us.

**WILKEN:** Let's talk a bit about – before we move on to we as citizens – talk a little bit more about the government.

**BENDER:** Sure.

**WILKEN:** There is a twofold task that you mentioned before, that Paul makes explicit for existing authorities. And that is to punish the evildoer, to reward those who do good. And you say that Christians ought to regard this as both the government's punishment and reward and God's temporal punishment and reward.

**BENDER:** That's exactly right. And Luther liked to make the distinction of kingdoms: the left hand and the right hand, or the secular and the spiritual. And he said these are both God's kingdoms, the way in which He works. And we want the civil authority to punish evildoers, to bring the full judgment of the law of the land down upon them, to incarcerate criminals and so forth. Because when they do that, then we as ministers of

the Gospel in the right hand kingdom are given the opportunity to call to repentance and to proclaim the forgiveness of sins. When the government does not do its proper work as an agent of the law, it becomes actually more difficult for the Church to do her work, primarily as an agent of the Gospel in proclaiming forgiveness and mercy. And if a Christian sins grievously and breaks the laws of the land, even something as horrific as an act of physical murder, and is sentenced to life in prison, there's a way in which that punishment in the civil realm strips him of all reliance upon himself and teaches him the reality of his sin – so that he can then have ears to hear God's mercy and love for him. And he is forgiven his sin when he is brought to repentance. He still stays in the jail, whatever the civil authority has meted out as his punishment. But he learns to depend then only upon the grace of God, the mercy of God, the forgiveness of God. And this is the way in which the left hand kingdom, or the secular, and the right hand kingdom, the spiritual, have interplay and support one another.

**WILKEN:** Let's talk briefly about the "honor your father and mother" aspect of this, because one of Luther's great insights into civil government is that it is not a source in itself. That by way of, I guess you could say social institution, God begins with father and mother, and only through father and mother does He grant authority to all authorities, even kings and emperors and other civil governments.

**BENDER:** Yeah. He sees it as an extension of Fourth Commandment authority, which means, then, that marriage and family are the fundamental building blocks of all civilized countries and governments of the world. Now this is one of the reasons why we as Christians have a vested interest in upholding the traditional marriage and family, the sanctity of marriage and family, because – not only to refrain to do that, not

only is that an attack on God's order and upon God Himself, but to fail to do that means that the society and the culture is opened up to all manner of evil and it has the potential of crumbling completely.

**WILKEN:** Luther has this little chain of events. Why don't you talk about it, with about a minute and a half? He says, "If a son will not listen to his father and mother, then he has to listen to the constable. And if he won't listen to the constable, then he has to listen to the judge. If he won't listen to the judge, he has to listen to the jailer. And if he won't listen to the jailer, he will listen to the hangman." What is Luther talking about there?

**BENDER:** He's talking about the force of law to bring about knowledge of wrongdoing. The force of law has its civil use, to simply maintain order – in the household, you've got to stop throwing the ball around the house and stop beating up on your sister. And the first concern of the parent is, "Whether you believe this is a good idea to stop beating up on your sister or not, I'm not going to have that, because if you're going to keep doing it, you're going to kill her," and all manner of problems will ensue from that. And so he's very serious about the maintaining of the force of law for the protection of society, for the protection of family, but then, ultimately, for the cause of the Gospel. Because unless we see the reality of our sin and our fallen condition, we will have no use for Christ. And the recalcitrant sinner, who refuses to believe in the reality of that is eventually going to face the hangman, as Luther says, if he's not going to hear all of God's agents along the way and then give assent that what God says is good is, in fact, good.

**WILKEN:** Pastor Peter Bender is our guest. He's pastor of Peace Lutheran Church and Director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy in Sussex, Wisconsin. This is part two of a five-part series we're doing with

him on Christian vocation. Today: civil government. Of course, we can't talk about government without talking about the citizens. And we will, on the other side of the break, right after we answer some hard cases – government that's not just poor or bad, but outright evil. Stay tuned.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. On this Wednesday afternoon, December the 28<sup>th</sup>, we're talking about civil government and you as a citizen. Pastor Peter Bender is our guest for part two of a five-part series on Christian vocation. Pastor Peter Bender is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church and Director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy in Sussex, Wisconsin. You can find out more about the Concordia Catechetical Academy and the resource that we're basing our series on, *Lutheran Catechesis*, at our website, [issuesetc.org](http://issuesetc.org). Click "Listen on Demand."

Pastor Bender, before we go on to talk about citizens – and the two really go hand in glove, and we've talked a lot about citizens already, but before we do that, let's talk about the hard cases. And that would be governments that are manifestly evil. They not only, in some cases, forbid the Gospel to be freely preached, persecute Christians, but they carry out many other evil acts besides even those great evils. And we don't have to go too far back in history to see them; some of them still exist in the world today. And of course, you might say St. Paul was living under one of those at the time he wrote Romans 13. The hard cases: what do we do with those where, well, in the case of, say, Nazi Germany, that government had to be stopped. It had to be overthrown.

**BENDER:** Well, and that government was overthrown. When it engaged in unjust war against its neighbors, it eventually incurred the wrath of God through the Allied Forces that came against her. I think throughout

Biblical history, if you look at the narrative there in the Old Testament, it was shocking to the northern tribes of Israel, I'm sure, to hear from the prophets that God was raising up Assyria to visit His judgment upon them as an unbelieving people who had turned away from His Word. And the Assyrian Empire was one of the most ruthless empires in the ancient world. And God says it was His instrument against Israel. Habakkuk, who was a prophet particularly in the southern kingdom of Judah, was lamenting the apostasy of Judah, the perversion of justice, the impenitence and unbelief in the land, and cries out to God to do something, and the Lord says, "I'm going to, and you will not believe it. It's going to make your ears tingle. I'm going to raise up Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar, a people even more wicked than you to visit my judgment upon you." And of course, kind of to paraphrase Habakkuk, "That's not exactly what I had in mind." But these all become, again, occasions for us to entrust ourselves to God. We are all called to do – to be and to do only what we are given according to our station in life. As a minister of the Gospel, you and I have the responsibility from God to speak the truth about society's moral failings and issues and so forth, in order that we might give honor to Christ, call people to repentance, and bestow upon them the saving grace of God in Jesus. And so we have a responsibility to speak out against abortion, against – I think, at this time for us in our own country, the immorality of a government that continues to spend hand-over-fist and so forth. But we're not called to acts of civil disobedience. We're not called to acts that are contrary to God's Word. And I think that has to be held fast to. In Acts, the apostle Peter says in chapter 4 when he's told, "You can't preach in the name of Jesus anymore," he says, "We must obey God rather than men." In Acts 12, when King Herod assassinated James, cut off his head, there is no record in the Acts or the New Testament that a conspiracy was

engaged in by the disciples in the early Church to assassinate King Herod. Instead, they prayed. And in the case of James, when he was incarcerated, we have to say it was God's will that he be martyred for the cause of the Gospel, and to bear witness to the Gospel of Christ, and Christ's martyrdom for the salvation of the world by His own death. In the case of Peter, who was then arrested by Herod, they prayed for him, and it was God's will that he not be martyred, not at that time. He would wait a couple of decades to be crucified upside down at the hands of the wicked and evil Roman Emperor. So we're only given to do what we're called to do, according to God's Word, in our station in life. And then we pray, and we commend ourselves to God.

**WILKEN:** One more question in that regard. Is God's providence, or His ability to exact this kind of judgment, even among governments – you're talking about the Allied Forces, taking care of or executing God's wrath against Nazi Germany. Is God's providential care sophisticated enough that even in that, we must say – and in the same action of war, He was also executing His judgment on the Allied Forces? Many died. It was a costly war. I guess what I'm asking is: do we look back on something like that and say, "Well, we were totally in the right all the time, and God had no plan to admonish or discipline our people through such an action."

**BENDER:** I don't think we can ever say that we're totally right all the time. We're called to live by faith and not by sight. And in the case of Nazi Germany, God manifested a number of things by allowing the carnage to continue. And I think one of the things that He manifest in allowing that carnage to continue and Hitler refused to surrender – during Advent, my wife and I think maybe this was a mistake because it was on a Saturday night. We settled in to watch a movie, and it happened to be the last twelve days of Hitler's life. And it was difficult for

me to sleep the rest of the night in preparation for Sunday morning, having seen that movie. But what became clear is that these utterly godless, wicked regimes testify when the carnage of them continues, as it did in Nazi Germany, to exactly the truthfulness of what God's Word says about humanity. So it's almost like what you cited before from Luther about the child if he won't listen to the parent, and so on and so forth, he'll get all the way back to the hangman. Well, if the society is not going to follow even natural law and what is common decency and goodness, that is recognized by civilized nations down through the ages, then God is going to show forth, in what happens to those regimes, the truth of His Word. And I think it's important to note that in the case of so many of those, you have an atheistic, evolutionary dogma that is driving so many of them – certainly it was for Nazi Germany. And the futility of that theology and that way of thinking is manifest in part by the fact that God allows such things to continue and shows it forth in the carnage. And when Christians are caught up into it, and when Christians die in it, for us, since we are on a pilgrimage here, we should not think of that as God abandoning us in the slightest. But rather, when we, even to the point of death, like the death of James or the death of Stephen in the New Testament, are able to, by our confession of faith, bear witness to the greater truth of the Gospel in God's love for the world in Christ, that's a powerful witness when it is done in the face of death.

**WILKEN:** We've got about a minute and a half. Let's begin with the primary passages that have to do with we as citizens.

**BENDER:** Sure. Continuing on in that Romans passage, 13:5-7, in Luther's Table of Duties under "Citizens" he cites those passages necessary to submit to the authorities – not only because of possible punishment (if you don't submit, you'll be punished), but also because of conscience.

And there when St. Paul cites the conscience, he is alluding to the fact that for us as Christians, our conscience is always captive to the Gospel of Christ, is always governed by faith in Him. And so as Jesus submitted to the authorities, so we do because we believe in Christ Jesus. And then he goes on in that Romans passage, "This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing." And they are God's servants, not simply when they happen to be Christians, whether they're Christians or not, whether they're believers or not, they are God's servants. "Give everyone what you owe him," he goes on to say, "If you owe taxes, pay taxes. If revenue, then revenue. If respect, then respect. If honor, then honor." And that's the passage from Romans. And then Paul, in 1 Timothy 2:1-3, directing Timothy as a pastor and in the instruction of other pastors concerning the liturgy of the church, what we sometimes call the Prayer of the Church, he says, "I urge then first of all that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone for kings and all those in authority." And then here's the reason that he cites: "That we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior, that we live peaceful and quiet lives." And I submit to you, Todd, that that exhortation for the church to pray for the civil authorities is not first that the civil authorities do what we want, but more importantly, that we as Christians learn to trust in God when they fail.

**WILKEN:** We'll take a break. When we come back, more on our citizenship here in this world under civil government.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* Part two of a five-part series on Christian vocation today, civil government and our



lives as citizens under it. Pastor Peter Bender is our guest.

Pastor Bender, you said before the break that the prayer that St. Paul calls for on behalf of kings and other authorities is not that we ask God that the government do what we want, but that we would be trusting of God, even when the government fails. What do you mean?

**BENDER:** That's right. We all too often think of prayer as us trying to bend God's will to our will, when in reality prayer has much more to do with asking God to make His will ours. And so when the Church is called to pray for the civil authorities, what bubbles up in us is the desire for revenge, the desire for revolution, the desire to dishonor, the desire to call up talk radio programs and blast away with unbridled rancor in our speech. But here, St. Paul says we are to pray that we might live peaceful and quiet lives. That doesn't mean, again, that we don't speak the truth, but we speak the truth in love. That doesn't mean that we don't confess the sanctity of human life and of marriage between a man and a woman; we certainly do. But we do it with the utmost honor and respect and devotion to God. And we chafe against civil authorities that are particularly hostile to Christianity. That's why we need prayer: that God would teach us to live from His grace, even as Jesus lived from the love of the Father. And that's the chief reason why we pray for the civil authorities, that we might be changed, that we might learn to live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us at the hands of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor.

**WILKEN:** Are there other passages that we didn't get to before the break?

**BENDER:** There are a few. Luther cites St. Paul's letter to Titus 3:1, "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good." And then the last one

that he cites is 1 Peter 2:13-14 – and this is an important one because it is in the section in the apostle Peter's first letter that deals extensively with the entire subject of Christian vocation, and we'll be talking about it in the remaining segments in the days ahead. Verses 13-14 are, "Submit yourselves, for the Lord's sake, to every authority instituted among men." When Peter cites "the Lord's sake," he especially has in mind the Lord Jesus. Because the Lord submitted, again, to Pontius Pilate, to this civil authority, then we are called to do the same. And that verse is set right after the famous passage – in fact, you just quoted from it a moment ago before the break – "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood. Once you were not a people, but now you are a people. Once you had not obtained mercy, but now you have obtained mercy." We are called, like the Old Testament Israelites were, to be on a pilgrimage through this world where they see the mercy of God at work in the congregation of the Church and in Christians. So they see that in us as we receive the mercy of God that is undeserved, it shapes submission to civil authority and as Peter will go on in chapter 3, submission of wives to husbands, and in a certain sense, husbands also to wives. And the climax, perhaps of that section in Peter, is that at the end of chapter 2, where he says – and notice the language of vocation, Todd, as we're talking about being called by the Gospel – verse 20 says, "What credit is it to you if you are beaten for your faults, or if you are beaten for having broken the civil laws? But if you take that patiently, what credit is that? But if you are suffering for good and you receive that patiently, this is commendable to God." Verse 21, "for to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us." So we're called to suffer under the civil authorities, to bear patiently, to pray for them, even as Jesus suffered under the civil authority, honored them, bore patiently His suffering and lot, and by so doing, won our salvation.

**WILKEN:** Then when we live as citizens in this world, we often find ourselves, especially – well, only Christians can actually have this tension.

**BENDER:** That's right.

**WILKEN:** We live as citizens in this world, but we know that our citizenship, as St. Paul says, isn't permanent in this world. In fact, many Christians today are in danger of confusing, say, being an American with being a Christian. They consider the two synonymous with one another. Speak to that confusion, if you would, and how, ultimately this is, again, about the First Commandment, even with regard to civil government and that our citizenship is most definitely not of this world – with about a minute and a half before we wrap it up.

**BENDER:** Sure. You called it a tension, and that's a good word. I think we could call it a paradox too, just because we are a royal priesthood on a pilgrimage and our citizenship is not of this world. That does not mean, as some would conclude, that we are disengaged from the world. For a Christian to be disengaged from the world and not to participate as a citizen in being elected to office, or voting, or participating in public discourse in a respectful way, is really a self-centered thing to do. We're called, as Christians, to be not of the world but in the world, and especially for the benefit of our fellow citizens, the benefit of our neighbor. The way in which we are engaged in the world bears witness to our faith in Christ on the one hand, or our lack of faith and confidence in Him on the other. So it's true. Our citizenship is not of here. But we're absolutely engaged in this world, even as Jesus was, in order to redeem the time and to bear witness to Christ. And I think this is part of the reason why our Lord tarries. He's giving each of us in our callings as Christians, our call to faith in Him, to have Him manifest His very life of mercy and compassion in us in love for others. That's

how our light so shines before men, and we give glory to our Father in heaven, who gave us His only Son – not because we merited Him, but because He loved us.

**WILKEN:** Finally, then, with only about a minute, we're going to be talking with you tomorrow about the vocation of husband, wife, parents, and children. What's on tap for next time?

**BENDER:** Yeah, these are my favorite sections because they come so close to the essence of what it is to be human and what it is to be made under the image of God. And for us as Christians, what it is to be governed in our station in life according to our calling, the calling of faith in Christ, the call of His forgiveness. And that faith in the forgiveness of sins shapes the way the husband understands himself and the wife understands herself, and how we relate to one another, and also parents to children and children to parents.

**WILKEN:** Pastor Peter Bender is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church and Director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy in Sussex, Wisconsin. Pastor Bender, I look forward to tomorrow's conversation. Thank you again for your time.

**BENDER:** You're welcome, Todd. I look forward to it myself.

**WILKEN:** It is a good gift. Now, I know that's difficult to believe when government is so dysfunctional, when those who occupy government are so dysfunctional, and worse than dysfunctional. First of all, we ought to give thanks to God that we have the government as good as it is, because it is so remarkably good – especially compared with how Christians have had to live under governments throughout most of their history. The freedom and the liberty is unprecedented. And the ability to speak freely the Gospel, to believe and to worship, is unprecedented. We of all people should give thanks to God for this, for now, and

pray that God continue it among us, for our children and for the Church to come. But there is no guarantee that it will continue. And if history teaches any lesson, it is that these bright moments of freedom are often just punctuations of largely bad government. But St. Paul, writing under some of the worst government ever, says that it is a good gift of God, instituted by God to be obeyed, God's servant. And if it were not for our sin, this is really – we really wouldn't need government, would we? But we do. It's a testament to our sin. But that sin not only necessitates government among us, it

necessitates a Savior to come. Now, what does it say about this Savior? It says the government shall be upon His shoulder. His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, Everlasting Father. That Jesus is the real answer. The real king, the real sovereign, and we are citizens of His kingdom – not only now, but for eternity.

I'm Todd Wilken. Talk with you tomorrow. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.*

