

WORSHIP AND  
PUBLIC POLICY



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A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Worship and Public Policy  
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## Welcome to *Worship and Public Policy*

Here are two subjects that, at first glance, seem to have nothing to do with one another.

Closer consideration, however, reveals that they are inextricably linked. Worship is about God – honoring Him, committing to Him, and serving Him in all aspects of life.

Public policy is about life and the rules by which people live. God is Ruler of all things, and thus public policy is only valid to the extent that it lines up with God's good and perfect rule.

But for that to be the case, public policy must be shaped by those who know and worship God. Thus our worship of God must necessarily guide our involvement in public policy, so that God is honored and served in all of life.

It's a good idea for us who worship God to understand as much as possible about the interface between these two subjects. Our look at Psalm 149 will provide an introductory outline of this matter.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 The Beginning and End of Faith

*Praise the LORD!  
Sing to the LORD a new song,  
And His praise in the assembly of saints....  
Praise the LORD! Psalm 149.1, 9*

### *A curious state of affairs*

It is curious to consider, and a challenge to explain, the lack of Christian impact in the public square in America today.

On the one hand, Christian leaders have been quite visible advocating for certain policies, supporting this or that candidate, and loudly denouncing views with which they disagree.

Add to that the fact that, according to an [ABC News Poll](#), something like 83% of all Americans consider themselves to be Christians. And, while we understand that “Christian” can mean different things to different people, the [Barna Group](#), a leading Christian social research agency, estimates that 45% of all Americans claim to be “born again.”

That amounts to something like 150 million Americans who profess faith in the resurrected and reigning Lord Jesus Christ!

So it’s curious why there is so little correspondence between the teaching of God’s Word on such topics as personal morality, the role of government, the purpose of culture, ethics and civility, the education of children, sex and marriage, etc., and the actual state of affairs in the nation today. Since the Kingdom of God, to which all Christians have been called (1 Thess. 2.12), is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18), we can say this much, at least: Christians are having little apparent Kingdom impact on the public policies of our nation.

And explaining that, as I said, can be a bit of a challenge.

### *Avenues of explanation*

Why is this so? We might offer a variety of explanations for this seemingly contradictory situation.

Some Christians insist that faith and politics don’t mix, or that somehow they exist in two different “realms” and shouldn’t have any meaningful interface. We can be good Christians, on the one hand, but that doesn’t have anything to do with our political views. Most Christians who hold to this view do so unconsciously: they simply have never considered whether their faith in Jesus has anything to do with the workings of culture or the institutions of our society.

Other Christians might simply regard politics as a “lost cause” and prefer to invest their time, energy, and resources in more rewarding and eternal endeavors, such as worship or missions. Politics can’t save us, so why bother with it?

Still others might say they’re doing their best to act and function as Christians in the public square, and they don’t agree with my point about the disjunction between what we profess and what we actually see. They think things are going just fine, quite in line with their understanding of Christian faith.

But everything and everyone they support struggles against the currents of cultural, social, and moral life.

Each of these views, and probably several more, exist among professing Christians today. And each of them should be held up to the scrutiny of Scripture. For at the end of the day, the followers of Jesus Christ have always believed that the Bible must have the last word on all matters of faith and life. We're only truly following Jesus when we're following Him according to His Word, and not according to what we *feel* or what the spirit of the age commends.

And so we need to consider what the Word of God has to say about the relationship between the life of faith and life in the public policy arena – and first of all, whether there actually *is* or *should be* any relationship between these.

*All of a piece*

The short answer to this question is simple: As Psalm 149 demonstrates, Christians worship God both as an act of religious devotion and as a matter of civic responsibility. Both the sanctuary and public square afford opportunities for believers to worship and serve God, and our faith is only fully operative when we are worshiping the Lord in both venues – and everywhere in between.

Of course, I'll need to unpack that assertion a bit more.

Psalm 149 is written in the form of an *inclusio*. An *inclusio* is a literary form that begins and ends in the same place. As our text for today demonstrates, Psalm 149 begins and ends in worship: "Praise the LORD!" To insist that the Christian life begins and ends in worship will not, I suspect, draw too many protests. Salvation is all of grace, God in His lovingkindness provides for us every day of our lives, and we are being kept by God's Spirit for eternal glory in the new heavens and new earth. For the Christian, every week and every day should begin and end in worship.

But what we see in Psalm 149 leads us to consider that, not only the beginning and end of our lives, *but everything in between as well, including our relationship with government*, is bound up in our calling from and duty toward our Savior and King. We are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, so that every moment and activity of our lives is only our "reasonable" service of worship to God (Rom. 12.1).

Christian life, in other words, is all of a piece, and in all of it we must be conscious of our duty to worship and serve God. And, as we shall see, this includes our participation in matters of public policy.

*For reflection*

1. What do we mean by "public policy"? Who makes public policy? How does public policy affect the populace? Should we care about public policy?
2. What do we mean by "worship"? What is worship? What is it for? When should we worship? How should we worship?
3. Apparently, worship relates to public policy. How we worship can actually affect public policy. Do you agree? Why or why not?

*Next steps – Conversation: How should a Christian understand the relationship between faith and policy? What does your church teach on this question? What do your Christian friends think?*

## 2 A Joyous New Song

*Praise the LORD!  
Sing to the LORD a new song,  
And His praise in the assembly of saints.  
Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;  
Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.* Psalm 149.1, 2

### *A new song*

In the Scriptures, the life of faith is often expressed or summed-up as a song. When Israel was delivered from slavery in Egypt, Miriam led the people in a song of joyous redemption, to sum-up and celebrate the new lives of freedom they were beginning to enjoy (Ex. 15).

As Moses prepared the people of Israel to enter the land of promise, he was instructed by God to compose a song, to help the people remember His grace, so that they would remain faithful to Him generation after generation (Deut. 32). The book of Psalms contains many songs – like Psalm 149 – which are given to aid the people of God in expressing their gratitude toward and love for Him, as we remember, with sweet melodies and moving rhythms, His goodness and grace.

The song of faith is a *new* song. It is a song of freedom from sin, judgment, and death, a song of hope and conviction focused on Jesus and His salvation. It is a song of witness, resolve, dedication, and daily rejoicing in the presence and power of our living Lord. So great, so *new* and *different* is the song of Christian faith, that God’s people are commanded, over and over, to sing this new song joyously. We are even told that one of the indications of the filling of God’s Spirit is that we *sing new songs of faith* to one another, and thus encourage one another in our experience of God’s grace (Eph. 5.18-21).

### *A joyous song*

Ours is a joyous song which celebrates a joy-filled life. Joy is the manifestation of the indwelling Spirit of God (Gal. 5.22, 23), the consequence of living in the righteousness and peace of God’s Kingdom (Rom. 14.17, 18), and the realization, in every area of our lives, that Jesus’ Word is reliable, sure, and true (Jn. 15.11). The joy we have as Christians is, on the one hand, completely detached from the circumstances of our everyday lives, because it is grounded in eternal and unchanging verities and the precious and very great promises of God (Hab. 3.17-19).

On the other hand, the joy we have in living “under the heavens” rather than merely “under the sun” spreads into, transforms, and comes to expression in all we are, think, say, and do. The *joy* we know is grounded in the *hope* we cling to because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that hope and joy, become visible in every aspect of our lives, and can cause others to wonder and even inquire about what makes us different from other people (1 Pet. 3.15).

Our joyous new song is both a *personal* testimony and a *communal* experience. Each believer knows the joy of the Lord, face to face with the Lord of glory, because of the gift of salvation we have graciously received. At the same time, the joy we know in our salvation is a *shared* joy. We have many brothers and sisters and fellow citizens who experience as we do the joy of salvation, and who strengthen that joy in us through their own witness and testimony.

Such joy cannot be contained. It must be sung, shouted, and shared, for it shapes and strengthens every aspect of our lives in the world.

*The focus of worship*

We worship God because we have joy *in Him*. He is our joy. His salvation gives us joy. Christians gather week by week to join their voices in joyful adoration, praise, and thanksgiving to Him Who gives them joy at all times, in every season, regardless of the circumstances and conditions of their lives.

Christians also rejoice in their salvation day by day. We begin our day with worship, seeking the Lord and His joy for whatever lies ahead of us in the coming day. And we conclude our day with joy, as we take our rest in the Lord, secure in the strength of His saving grace and the unchanging reliability of His Word.

It only makes sense, therefore, that, focused on the *source* of our joy – our exalted Lord Jesus Christ – the joy we know in Him will come to expression in how we live in every area of life. We not only seek the joy of the Lord, but we seek to be joy-bringers to our world. The message of the Gospel, which speaks to all areas of life, is a message of joy.

Christians can take the joy they have in Jesus into their work. They rejoice in their spouses and families, in the beauty of creation and the delights of culture, all of these good gifts and expressions of God's grace. Christians rejoice in each day's provision, and for good health, safety, friendship, and a multitude of daily blessings and delights. Joy is thus a primary attribute of all who truly know the Lord Jesus Christ, and such joy cannot be restricted to personal devotions, Lord's Day worship, or any supposed realm of merely spiritual experience. The joy we know and sing must spill out into and shape our approach to every area of our lives.

This includes our participation in matters of public policy. For the Christian, the public square is but one more arena where God intends to raise a banner for His joy, by employing the people who know His joy to announce and embody it to the world, including within the framework of public policy. We do not set aside our faith as we become engaged in matters of the public interest. And therefore we do not set aside our joy, either; rather, as the joy of the Lord informs and shapes all other aspects of our lives, so it must in the arena of public policy.

*For reflection*

1. What is joy? What's the difference between joy and happiness? Which should we seek?
2. Meditate on Psalm 16.11 and Romans 14.17, 18. Why is joy associated so closely with the Lord and His Kingdom?
3. If we wish to spread the joy of the Lord among our neighbors, can we do so apart from Jesus and His Kingdom? What are the implications of this for our role in matters of public policy?

*Next steps – Conversation: How do you experience the joy of your salvation? How do you express that joy? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.*

### 3 Song of the King

*Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;  
Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.  
Let them praise His name with the dance;  
Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp.* Psalm 149.2, 3

#### *The power of a song*

How would you have felt? Rudely set upon by an angry mob. Stripped half naked, then beaten within an inch of your life. Without trial or formal charges, thrown into a miry dungeon and clapped in irons. How would you have felt?

Like singing?

Yet that is precisely what Paul and Silas did in that dank dungeon in Philippi, so many years ago (Acts 16). When most people would have sat weeping and cringing in terror, Paul and Silas tapped into the joy of their salvation and sang a psalm of praise to the Lord – perhaps even Psalm 67, a hymn that calls on God to bless the world with His salvation.

How powerful was that song, which rose from the joy and faith of two itinerate missionaries? God heard it, and He shook the earth. Prisoners and the jailer heard it, and many were converted to Christ. And in the public square of that Roman colony in Philippi, the city officials heard the song of Christ and His salvation as well – and they trembled!

#### *The focus of our song*

The Christian song is a song of joy. It fills our daily devotions and is the defining motif in our corporate worship. The Christian's song of joy spreads like leaven into every aspect of his everyday life, putting all of life in an eternal context and giving all of life a significance nothing else can match.

But while our song is a song of joy, joy is not the *focus* of our song. The focus of our song, and the reason it is so joyous, is our Creator and King, our Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice because Christ is the Creator of the world and everything in it: "The earth *is* the LORD's, and all its fullness," we joyously proclaim (Ps. 24.1). And we rejoice in the knowledge that He Who made the world and all the vast cosmos rules over it by His Word of power, according to His good and perfect will, without interruption and without end (Heb. 1.3). We rejoice because this all-sovereign, all-wise, all-powerful Creator and King has made and redeemed and adopted us, and is at work within us, transforming us into His own image, making us willing and able to do all things according to His good pleasure in every aspect of our lives (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Phil. 2.13).

Our lives are a song to King Jesus. Each day, activity, relationship, role, and responsibility is like a bar of music in the cantata of joy Jesus is composing over the entire *course* of our lives. Paul says that we are Jesus' *poem* (Eph. 2.10, Greek). He might just as well have said we are His song.

Jesus is King, not just of our *spiritual lives*, or of the time of our lives when we worship or express our devotion to Him, but Jesus is King of *all* of our lives, and of *all life and every creature*.

Having made the world, He intends to order it for the glory of God, according to His holy and righteous and good Word, and unto His joy. And He has created and redeemed and indwelled us, His people, to carry the joyous song of His sovereign, redeeming love into every aspect of human life and interest.

*Singing the hope of the world*

Paul and Silas were physically pained and no doubt a little rattled by their experience in Philippi. Still, this did not keep them from singing about the salvation of the Lord – of that great and glorious hope that surpasses every circumstance, makes sense of every misfortune, and brings meaning and purpose and *joy* into every arena of life.

They were bolstered in their faith and so were ready when the Lord brought to them one who was seeking the salvation of the Lord. Their song of the Lord's salvation kept them from feeling sorry for themselves, focused them on the ultimate and eternal goodness and power of God, and readied them with a firm witness for Jesus when the opportunity arose.

Doubtless there was joy in heaven over the resolute faith of those faithful witnesses, even as there was over the conversion of the joy-struck Philippian jailer.

The song of joy and salvation which Paul and Silas sang – and which is the song of every true believer – has the power in God to embolden our witness, convert the lost, and affect even the hardened hearts and corrupt policies of the civil powers-that-be (cf. Ps. 81.15).

*For reflection*

1. Is there a particular hymn that ties you into the joy of the Lord as you sing it? Why? What is it about this hymn that brings you into the Lord's joy?
2. Do you think this and other hymns, and perhaps even certain psalms, could be a continuous source of joy for you? Explain.
3. As you sing your way into the joy of the Lord throughout the day, how do you suppose this might affect the people around you? How might this shape your understanding of the way things ought to be as Christ's Kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven?

*Next steps – Preparation: Look through a hymnal until you find a hymn that exalts Jesus as King and Lord. Do any of the words of this hymn constitute a threat to any aspect of American public policy? Dare we sing such songs by our lives as well as our words? Talk with a Christian friend about these questions.*

## 4 Adorned with Salvation

*For the LORD takes pleasure in His people;  
He will beautify the humble with salvation.* Psalm 149.4

### *Worship as celebration*

Why do Christians worship in the first place? What's the purpose of worship?

In many pagan religions the purpose of worship is to *placate* the gods – to keep them happy and stay on their good side, lest they mess with, you know, the harvest or procreation or whatever. Worship is thus a *work* pagans do to *earn* the favor of their deity.

Christians don't worship to placate God or earn His favor. We don't worship to make God happy or bring Him pleasure. God is all-satisfied, all-happy, and all-pleased in Himself alone. We add nothing to Him when we come together to worship.

At the same time, as we worship, God adds Himself to us, bringing us into His presence and joy in ways that transform all we are, think, feel, value, say, and do.

Essentially, Christians worship for three reasons, and Psalm 149 glances on each of these. The first and most obvious reason Christians worship is to *celebrate God*. God is incomparably great and good. And He has done great and good things for us. When we're in His presence, and especially when we're together with other believers in His presence, we can't help but break out in our songs of joy because of the greatness and goodness of our God.

In worship we celebrate God, declaring His many glorious attributes and virtues, boasting of His great works, and rejoicing in the privilege and pleasure of knowing and participating in Him. Worship is not worship that isn't characterized throughout by the celebration of God.

### *Worship as inspection*

But worship is also a time of *inspection*. Remember, God calls His people together for worship – as we symbolize in the “call to worship” that begins our corporate services. As we see in Psalm 50, God “musters His troops” as it were on the Kingdom green. He comes to inspect us thoroughly, to observe our outward practices in worship, of course, but even to look into our hearts, to search out our daily lives, to instruct, admonish, and warn as necessary, depending on what He sees in each one of us.

When troops assemble for inspection, they come dressed in all their best and stand straight and still, at attention, waiting on their turn under the scrutinizing eye of their commander. When God's people assemble for worship we need to make sure that our hearts are cleansed and pure, that there are no lingering sins or outstanding debts of love which we owe to others. We need to make sure our minds are fixed on things that are above – and that we so value our time with the Lord that we are not allowing our souls to stray to other matters. As we come before the Lord of glory we sing with full hearts and boisterous mouths, praying and praising with urgency, and hearing the Word of God with every determination to obey.

In worship God inspects His people, searching us by His Spirit, to expose and expunge anything in any area of our lives that is not consistent with the salvation He has given us in Jesus Christ (Ps. 139.23, 24).

### *Worship as preparation*

Finally, worship is a time of *preparation*. In worship we empty ourselves in celebration and stand up to the

Lord's inspection. And as we hear the Word of God and partake of Him in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, God is doing something within us. As our Psalm expresses it, He is beautifying our lives with His salvation. He is "suited us up" with His great salvation in our times of worship – personal and corporate – so that we can go forth from that formal worship context to continue our worship of God in every facet of our everyday lives. Our salvation, in fact, amounts to an ongoing experience of worship, as the joy of the Lord transforms and equips us for daily living in all areas of life (Rom. 12.1, 2).

As we worship, therefore, we must listen carefully to hear God speaking into our souls and our lives. We should be eager to acquire new insights and ideas, to lay aside wrong affections and embrace new ones, to solidify God-honoring values and choices, and to discern the paths of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit for all our words and deeds.

When we have truly met with the Lord in worship, we will come forth, having been scrutinized by and beautified in Him, better equipped to serve Him with the power of His salvation.

As we live out the transformation we experience in worship, we become living examples of the saving grace and power of the Lord. We show Jesus to the world. We demonstrate grace, patience, kindness, and all the fruit of the Spirit. We evidence to one and all the tokens of love, the virtues of holiness, the warmth of understanding and compassion, and the uncompromised demands of eternal truth. We do not live like flotsam and jetsam on the ever-changing currents of a storm-tossed sea. We ride the Wind of God Who moves the seas, the earth, and everything in them.

And when, having celebrated the Lord and having been examined and transformed by Him in worship, we go forth into the world of work and things and people and responsibilities, we go with a changed countenance and demeanor. We show by our lives the hope of the Gospel (1 Pet. 3.15), a hope which speaks truth into all aspects of life, including the arena of public policy.

*For reflection*

1. How does your understanding of worship compare with what was explained in this article?
2. Meditate on Isaiah 28.9-13. What role does corporate worship fulfill in this process?
3. Meditate on Romans 12.1, 2. How can singing and worship help to keep us in the presence of the Lord and His joy throughout the day?

*Next steps – Transformation: Celebration, inspection, preparation: Do these ideas define your own practice of worship? In which of these areas do you need to improve your worship of God? Share your thoughts with a Christian friend.*

## 5 Armed and Ready

*Let the saints be joyful in glory;  
Let them sing aloud on their beds.  
Let the high praises of God be in their mouth,  
And a two-edged sword in their hand...* Psalm 149.5, 6

### *Prepared how?*

We said that one of the purposes of worship is to *prepare* the saints of the Lord to live out the joy of their salvation – the song of their Creator/King – in every area of their lives. But *how* are we prepared? What happens in us during worship, and what are we given that enables us to fulfill this high and sacred calling?

Our psalm explains: As we enter into the presence of the Lord in worship, exulting in glory, we encounter the living God as more than just an idea or a far off, otherworldly Being. We encounter Him as a *living* and *present* Being, the Creator and King of the universe, and we know His presence and power, penetrating to the depths of our souls and lifting us above our merely mundane experience into an unseen realm of glory that causes us to exult.

In worship, rightly conceived and conducted, our minds and imaginations expand beyond their everyday thoughts and dreams, stretched and molded to fill up with the glory of the heavenly throne room, to be conformed to the mind of Christ, and to see the world as He does (1 Cor. 2.16).

In such worship, our hearts are flooded with the living water of Christ's Spirit (Jn. 7.37-39), Who gives us a new heart, a malleable, spiritual heart, which is capable of affections of joy and exultation empowering us in ways more than we've ever dared to ask or think (Ezek. 36.26, 27; Eph. 3.20).

Our values and priorities are adjusted and confirmed, so that the set of our wills becomes something like, "Whatever my Creator and King requires of me, I will gladly and unhesitatingly do!" (Ex. 19.7, 8)

So that in worship, our souls are transformed and we exult to know and magnify the Lord, to be transformed in soul and life, and to be sent by Him into the everyday circumstances and vocations of our lives (Jn. 20.21).

### *Prepared with what?*

In that state of transformation and exulting, we are given a "two-edged sword." In ancient Israel the armies of the Lord worshiped before they went into battle, because they understood that they needed the Lord and His strength for their sortie into the "public square." So they worshiped, then they took their swords in hand to do battle with their enemies.

In our day the Church does not bear the sword of warfare, but the sword of the Spirit. The Word of God is able to equip us for every good work, in every area of life, for all aspects of culture, society, and life. This includes whatever may be required of us in the arena of public policy (Heb. 4.12; 2 Tim. 3.15-17). Whether our calling is to talk about public matters, support or elect candidates, or augur for policies more in line with the good and perfect will of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are able to equip us for such good works, and to arm us for whatever conflict we may face.

### *Doing battle in the public square*

These days Christians seem to have little stomach for battling in the public square over matters of public policy. We look for candidates we think we can support and policies we think should change, but as for the daily skirmishes of word and deed where public policy battles are won or lost, we tend to leave that to the

professionals.

But, whether we choose to do so or not, we are participating in public policy, even if we only stand on the sidelines. All Americans, being members of “We the People,” have an interest and stake in public policy, and can play important roles in shaping the moral, social, and cultural climate of our country.

Christians and all citizens of this republic participate in public policy in three ways. First, through everyday *conversations*. People talk about matters of public policy all the time, usually to complain or lament some position or action recently taken by one or another branch of government. Armed with the sword of the Spirit and adorned with the grace of salvation, Christians can talk about public policy in such a way as to inform and persuade others concerning how our government can fulfill its God-given mandate as a servant for good (Rom. 13.1-4).

Second, Christians can engage matters of public policy through *publication* – by responding to articles on the web, blogging on a website, writing letters to the editor, even producing materials for use in their Bible study groups. By putting our views into writing we both clarify and firm them in our souls, and explain them to any who may read.

Finally, Christians can be active in public policy by *participating* in formal ways – voting, helping with a campaign, signing or circulating petitions, volunteering to serve a public official, standing for public office, attending meetings of councils, school boards, and the like.

Imagine how public policy in America might be shaped if Christians, exulting in the glory of God, adorned with the grace of salvation, and armed with well-honed words from God, were consistently and in a well-coordinated manner to become active in all these levels of public policy. As we shall see, the effects of such well-prepared engagement can be amazing.

Such preparation for wielding the Sword of the Spirit must begin in worship.

*For reflection*

1. Should we expect the King and Lord to Whom we come in worship to be interested in matters of public policy? Explain.
2. Is working in the public policy arena a good work? If so, how does Scripture apply in preparing us for it (2 Tim. 3.15-17)? How can worship help to tune our souls for such a calling?
3. Meditate on Psalm 45.3-5. What does Jesus wield as He goes forth conquering and to conquer (cf. Rev. 6.1, 2)? Should we wield anything else?

*Next steps – Preparation, Conversation: Should you become more involved in matters of public policy? How can worship help to equip you for this duty? Talk with some other believers about these questions.*

## 6 Wielding the Sword

*Let the saints be joyful in glory;  
Let them sing aloud on their beds.  
Let the high praises of God be in their mouth,  
And a two-edged sword in their hand,  
To execute vengeance on the nations,  
And punishments on the peoples;  
To bind their kings with chains,  
And their nobles with fetters of iron;  
To execute on them the written judgment—  
This honor have all His saints.  
Praise the LORD! Psalm 149.5-9*

### *People with a mission*

Some people struggle with psalms like this because they employ military terminology. “All that war and killing was for the Old Testament economy,” they opine. “We don’t take up such tactics to do the Lord’s bidding in this age of grace.”

And, certainly, there’s truth to that statement. But just because the Church doesn’t bear the sword of military conflict doesn’t mean we’re not involved in serious warfare, and that we haven’t been given a more powerful Sword than even the mightiest military systems on earth.

We have, and we are called and sent to wield the Sword of the Spirit in spiritual battle against spiritual forces of wickedness for the souls of men, the redemption of the world, and the honor and glory of God. We are a people on a mission. We will be more consistent and effective in our mission when we follow how God Himself presents that mission rather than how we like to conceive it. And God chooses the language of warfare to prepare us through worship to wield the weapons of our warfare in every area of life, including the arena of public policy.

### *Aspects of our warfare*

Let’s take the four key words in our text and see if we can apply them to our lives as believers in today’s world. I think we’ll see that each of these terms *must* find us fulfilling our duties in the arena of public policy in one or more of the ways we discussed in our previous installment.

The first term is *vengeance*. We wield the Sword of the Spirit to execute *vengeance* against our enemies.

Is this not what Jesus did during His temptation in the wilderness? Three times the devil sought to gain the heavenly throne by subjugating our King to his wiles. And three times Jesus wielded the Sword of the Spirit to repel and defeat him.

Every day the devil tries to throw Jesus off the throne of our lives by strewing our paths with temptations. And every day we must wield the Sword of the Spirit against his usurping ambitions, executing *vengeance* against him by keeping him in his place and staying the course of obedience and sanctification. Should we not be equally concerned to banish his presence from the halls of government and the arena of public policy?

The next term is *punishments*. In Biblical Law, punishment involves taking measures to restore justice to a situation where justice has been compromised. Should we wield the Word of God in the name of justice? Should we be concerned that all the various kinds of justice, in all the different areas of life, should be

maintained in order to work God's good and perfect will for all people?

How can we not?

The Lord commands His people to seek justice at all times, and when justice has been compromised, then we bring the Word of God to bear in an effort to correct injustice and restore the *shalom* of God (Deut. 16.20).

Next, we are to wield the Word of God in order to *bind* civil magistrates so that they cannot act in certain ways. God claims that He had "bound" His people with "cords of kindness" and "bands of love" (Hos. 11.4). He was referring His holy and righteous and good Law, which, as the people of Israel obeyed His Law, would guide them in the ways of wisdom and love, and make them the envy of the surrounding nations (Deut. 4.5-8). Christians today seem to want to have nothing to do with the Law of God, so it's not surprising that our nation's political leaders feel free to make laws of all sorts which are directly contrary to God's teaching. Like the rulers in Psalm 2, political leaders today do not want to be restrained by the Law of God. Yet it is our duty as Christians to help them see the wisdom, kindness, and love of God in His Word, and to work for laws and public policies that reflect the good, just, and righteous character of the God we worship.

Finally, *judgment*. We are called to wield the Sword of the Spirit for *judgment*, which is simply to explain to people what God thinks and what His Word teaches concerning every area of human life and interest, including public policy.

Are our services of worship and our daily worship of the King and Ruler of the universe preparing us for such a high and holy calling?

*The surprising power of God's Word*

In Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 a prophecy occurs of such importance that both men felt they needed to record it, for their time and ours. This prophecy presents a picture of the nations and peoples of the world streaming up to the house of the Lord to learn more of Him and His ways.

What is causing multitudes to flow into the house of the Lord? And why is this happening?

Because, the prophets tell us, the people of God are going forth from the house of the Lord, wielding the Sword of God's Law in all the ways we have outlined here, bringing truth, grace, wisdom, and peace to the nations of the world.

When our worship equips us to wield God's Word in these ways, then the worship of God will spread into every area of life, richly adorning us with His salvation and affecting all the people around us for the honor and glory of our Creator and King.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. God's Word speaks to all aspects of life. Should we expect it to speak to matters of public policy? Such as?
2. Our text says that bearing the Sword into the public policy arena is an "honor" for "all His saints." How are you carrying out this honorable calling?
3. What makes worship the perfect place to begin fitting us to serve the Lord in the public square?

*Next steps – Preparation: Reflect on the four ways Christians are commissioned to wield the Sword of the Spirit. How well prepared, and how adept are you in each of these areas?*

## 7 Honor in the Ordinary

*This honor have all His saints.  
Praise the LORD! Psalm 149.9*

*The beginning and end*

Psalm 149 begins in the presence of God, where His people honor Him in worship and praise His holy Name. It ends not in a service of worship but in the everyday arenas of life, including the arena of public policy, where the people of God *express* the honor and glory of God which they have *experienced*, unto the praise of God in everyday life situations.

This they do by wielding the Sword of the Spirit with power and love.

Thus the glory of God, which leads us to exult in Him when we gather for public worship, bursts to light in the everyday arenas of life, glowing through us like the face of Moses, and turning the minds and perhaps the hearts of many to join us in praising and honoring the Lord. The honor of God is the beginning and end of Christian life, and worship is both the *context* in which we honor the Lord and the *outcome* of our living for Him according to His Word.

Worship is not an end in itself. Worship is not about us. Worship doesn't end when the morning service is over. Worship, as Paul suggested (Rom. 12.1, 2), is our "reasonable" response to being transformed increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ, in heart, mind, conscience, words, and deeds. We worship God when we gather as an assembly of His people. And we worship God when we wield His Word against spiritual forces of wickedness in high places, wherever those forces seek to claim any area of life for themselves rather than the Lord.

*Picking our battles*

As those who are called to take the two-edged Sword into all of life, we need to pick our battles, plan well, and prosecute them doggedly.

Each of us has a Personal Mission Field, an array of places and people where Jesus has sent us for the sake of seeking and advancing His Kingdom (Jn. 20.21; Matt. 6.33). Our worship of God – corporate and daily – should prepare us to go forth in exultation, adorned with God's salvation and armed with His Sword, to bring the power of God's rule to bear on all of life. This includes our marriages, homes and families, places of employment, schools, neighborhoods, communities, cultural activities, social lives, and, yes, even the public square – all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

The worship in which we participate with other believers on the Lord's Day should be such a time of celebration, inspection, and preparation that we are drawn into the very presence of the Lord and immersed in His glory, so that we exult in Him and lay our lives down as living sacrifices for His Kingdom (Rom. 12.1, 2). From there, armed with the Word of God, we go into our Personal Mission Fields, seeking the Lord's wisdom for how to use our time and carry on our work (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17), "conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6.2) for the progress of Christ's rule on earth as it is in heaven.

But where is the evidence that the worship in which we participate each Lord's Day is actually equipping us to worship God in every area of our lives? We began this series lamenting the fact that Christians seem to be little able to influence the arena of public policy for the honor and glory of God and His Kingdom. This can only mean that our worship is failing to fulfill the pattern and purpose outlined in Psalm 149 and elsewhere. Our worship is not equipping us for Kingdom living in our Personal Mission Fields, much less in the arena of

public policy.

*What you can do*

So what can you do? Can you make a difference? Well, first of all, do you *want* to make a difference? Or are you content not to “rock the boat” and let the ship of the Church continue to drift toward the shoals of shipwreck? Already young people are abandoning ship because they don’t believe Christianity is relevant or meaningful for the questions most pressing to them. Young adults are not far behind. Will we simply sit by and allow this to happen?

So what can you do?

First, pray. Pray daily and earnestly for God to pour out His Spirit in worship in ways you have not known before, so that He will stand forth in our worship, bring us into His glory, and do the transforming work only He can do. Begin and end your day in the kind of worship that enables you to see Jesus, exalted in glory, advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven through you.

Second, download the free study of this series, *Worship and Public Policy*, which you can do by clicking the link in the tag that follows. Work through the daily questions and “next steps” until your worship begins to fit you for Kingdom living such as Psalm 149 indicates. Then share this study with some friends, and invite them to join you in working through it.

Let’s make it our business to bring the business of worship full circle, from glory to glory, from God honored in public and private worship to God honored in the public square. And let’s continue to do so until the knowledge of the glory of God begins to fill, at least, our own Personal Mission Fields more fully and consistently (Hab. 2.14).

*For reflection or discussion*

1. How can you make more time for worship in your schedule? What will you do? How you will carry this worship into your daily life to honor the Lord?
2. In worship we *experience* the glory and presence of the Lord. In life we *express* His glory and presence. Explain.
3. Suppose Christians don’t become equipped for wielding the Sword of the Spirit in the public square. What will that likely mean for the nation?

*Next steps – Preparation : Which of the action steps called for in this installment will you take? Whom can you enlist in this effort with you?*

*Worship and Public Policy*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. How is worship related to the Christian's public life?
2. What should worship do for believers to better equip us for life in the public square?
3. Is your daily worship – reading and study of Scripture, coupled with meditation and prayer – helping to equip you for participating in matters of public policy? Explain.
4. How can Christians encourage and assist one another to be better equipped for wielding the Sword of the Spirit in the public policy arena?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you applying that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.