

HUMANISM
The Christian Faces the Issues
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As we open our hearts to begin to look at the issue of humanism a scriptural text comes to me from Proverbs 14:12. "There is a way that seems right unto man but the end thereof is death." Tonight I want to address 6 questions. What is humanism? What does the Bible teach about humanism? Where are the battle lines being drawn between biblical Christians and secular humanists within our culture? What are the dangers pertained in Christian involvement in political and moral issues relating to humanism? What compelling reasons force us as Christian to speak and to act? And what can we do? That's a tall agenda for the next few minutes.

What is humanism?

We need to be careful how we use words and "humanist" is a word that can be tossed around rather loosely. I've probably even used this word on occasion without really understanding what it meant. You look at any definition of humanism and immediately disassociate humanism from humanitarianism. Humanitarianism is a love for one's neighbor that Jesus himself teaches in Mark 12:31. You're to love your neighbor as yourself. Also disassociate the word "humanism" from the humanities which is a divisions with in a college which studies the arts, literature, culture, the classics and the like.

We need to next recognize that there is a great variety within humanism. Humanism is a word that is perhaps akin to the word "religion." Christianity is a religion. Buddhism is a religion. Islam is a religion. There are many religions. Religion is a rather broad term. Humanism is a rather broad term. There are many different trips of humanism. There are some who believe that man is a perfectible animal and as he gets more learning will create a just society. There are other humanists like Bertrand Russell who, toward the end of his life, took a very dim view of man's prospects forever improving himself and for having any hope at the end of the trail.

If the central thing that unites all religion is a belief in a higher power or God, the central thing that unites all humanists is a basic belief in man. God is not the center. God is not even at the extremity of the circle. Man is the center. Man is the totality. Man is the measure of all things.

It's been said, "The humanist philosophy strives to remind men that their only home is in this mundane world. There's no use searching anywhere else for happiness and fulfillment for there is no place else to go. We human beings must find our destiny and our promise land in the here and now or not at all. Therefore humanism because it looks to man as very time bound. It does not look outside of man to a God or to an eternal life or moral values that stand outside of what man has acquired as an evolutionary being."

We also should recognize that most humanists are not part of any humanistic organization. Most Christians are members of a church. Most humanists are not part of any particular organization or conspiracy. In fact I'm convinced that many persons in our culture are humanists and don't even know that they are. They wouldn't recognize the world that describes their philosophy if you told it to them.

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Perhaps a realistic way to determine the principles on which all humanists would agree would be to look at the secular humanist documents – the Humanist Manifesto I, II and more recently a Secular Humanist Declaration. I'd like to take a moment in answering the question What is humanism to look within these documents themselves for they reflect a strong consensus among humanists as to what defines the humanistic outlook on life.

Humanist Manifesto I dates from 1933. It originally had 34 signatories attached to it. Manifesto I had 15 basic affirmations which can be boiled down to 8 main ideas. Humanist manifesto I was atheistic in regarding the existence of God, naturalistic as regarding the existence of miracle [there are no miracles in the humanist concept because everything must be explained on a rational and naturalistic order.] Evolutionist in regard to man's origins. Relativistic concerning values. Optimistic about the future. Socialistic in the political view including the socialist idea of the unity of the human race in kind of a common world government. Religious in attitude toward life. "Religious" in meant as a kind of basic reverence for human life and values. And humanistic in regard to methods to achieve its goals. That is we must look to man and not to God to solve our problems.

Of course the Humanist Manifesto came out before World War II got under way. And after World War II and the Korean conflict and the Vietnam conflict there was considerable adjustment in humanistic optimistic outlook. So 40 years after Humanist Manifesto I was produced Manifesto II came out in 1973. Considerably less optimistic than the earlier Manifesto. Much stronger and more detailed in its expression of the Humanist philosophy. Scores of signatures were attached to this document.

Manifesto II made 17 basic affirmations about religion, ethics, the individual, democratic society and world community. A couple quotes: "We believe that traditional or dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place God, ritual or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. Any account of nature should pass the test of scientific evidence. In our judgment the dogmas and myths of traditional religions do not do so. We can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are and what we will become. No deity will save us. We must save ourselves. Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusionary and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization and from rectifying social injustices. We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest."

In each of these areas – the five major areas of religion ethics, the individual democratic society and world community there is a platform spelled out in Manifesto II.

In regard to religion the manifesto is atheistic. In regard to ethics it's situational. We do not look for revelation or rules given by a sovereign God that determine our moral conduct. We make the rules up as we go along, as they pertain to the well functioning and betterment of society.

With respect to the individual Manifesto II talks about the preciousness and dignity of each person as a central value. But in the area of sexuality it has this to say and it fits with situational ethics, "In the area of sexuality we believe that intolerant attitudes often cultivated by orthodox

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religions and puritanical cultures unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitive denigrating forms of sexual behavior neither do we wish to prohibit by law or social sanction sexual behavior between consenting adults. The many varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered evil. Without countenancing mindless permissiveness or unbridled promiscuity a civilized society should be a tolerant one. [That's kind of the watchword of our day. If you're not tolerant you're somehow intolerant and a bigot.] Short of harming others or compelling them to do likewise, individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their lifestyles, as they desire.

We need to recognize that philosophical statements like that are at the fountainhead of a lot that is going on in our culture today in terms of the sort of lifestyle that's perpetuated in any kind of communication aspects of our culture.

In respect to a democratic society Manifesto II promotes the idea of civil liberties, democracy, separation of church and state, increased economic well being for all with the right of the government to move in and insist on that economic well being, guaranteed annual income, right to universal education and an end to sexism.

With respect to the last tenant on world community the need was felt to transcend national sovereignty, repudiate violence as a means of solving international disputes (something I think we could all wish for and agree with), cooperative planning in respect to saving the eco-system, emphasis on global planning, technology and expansion of communication and transportation.

The last document to come out in 1980 that was signed by many luminaries in the humanistic camp is called a Secular Humanist Declaration. It is especially as a response made against attacks on the humanistic philosophy. The humanists are becoming very aware of the attacks from the Christian quarter and from other religious groups. The secular humanist declaration was an attempt to respond to that. There is a strong emphasis in this document upon the need for free inquiry, separation of church and state, upon religious skepticism and evolution. They call for an emphasis on the humanist for moral education. That is, making persons aware of the inherent dignity and worth in human beings.

Interestingly enough they complained about television. Christians are all the time complaining about television. The humanists said, In democratic societies, television, radio, films and mass publishing too often cater to the lowest common denominator and have become wastelands. There is a pressing need to elevate standards of taste and appreciation. We're all the time complaining how Christians are treated in the media and television programming. Here is the paranoia of the secular humanists. "A special concern to secularists is the fact that the media, particularly in the United States, are inordinately dominated by a pro religious bias. The views of preachers, faith healers and religious huxters go largely unchallenged and the secular outlook is not given the opportunity for a fair hearing. We believe that television directors and producers have an obligation to redress the balance and revise their programming.

All of this is an attack on the Christian owned radio and television stations of this country to sharply restrict their influence and do a massive rollback on all fronts.

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A survey was released about a week ago that indicated that one out of every three households in America is attuned to at least one Christian program a week on television. This is kind of an alarming thing and there's obviously a lot of people in the humanist camp that would like to see this invasion of religious television stopped on the free market of communications in America.

That's a rambling treatment so far on what is humanism. Let me try to boil it down into five essentials. I think you could take Manifesto I, Manifesto II and the secular humanist declaration and this all secular humanists would agree with.

1. Non theism. That's simply the lack of belief in any God.
2. Naturalism. That says that we can explain everything that's happening if we apply our reason to understand it. There is no such thing as a supernatural order or anything happening on a supra rational basis. There are no miracles. There are no resurrections. There are no healings that cannot be explained except in a para-psychological kind of sense.
3. Evolution. Man is an evolving animal.
4. Ethical relativism. That moral rules are developed by society as time passes and we're not to look for outside rules such as we find in the moral code of the Ten Commandments to govern our life.
5. Human self-sufficiency. We should not look outside of ourselves for the solution for our problems.

We might take a moment to then address a second question, which rises in a consideration by a Christian of humanism. What does the Bible say about humanism?

We recognize that the term humanism is not mentioned at all in the scripture. But the scriptures really do address the humanist mindset. The whole scriptures themselves present themselves as a revelation from God to man. Given that fact and once you accept that the scriptures are God's revelation from himself to us or any part of them are God's revelation to us, then you have a clear antithesis or disagreement of the scripture in regard to humanism. Humanism is saying there is no God. If there is a God somewhere he hasn't spoken to us at all. Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool has said in his heart there is no God." The clearest indictment against humanism perhaps found in the scripture is Romans 1:18-32, which articulates what happens in a society where knowledge of God is abandoned. Where persons suppress what is in their conscious and suppress the information that is given to them in the creation of a creator and follow ungodliness and wickedness. What can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them so they are without excuse. For although they knew God they did not honor him or give thanks to him but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened."

Two absolutely essential things needed for communication is that someone speak and someone listen. Romans 1 tells us that even in creation outside of the holy Bible even in creation God has been speaking and testifying to his eternal creation. It's apparent that God stands behind the creation. Lack of respect for God and lack of gratitude to God brings the exile of God from human life. Therefore man when he moves a way from God ultimately becomes animalistic in his outlook toward morals and toward life. God outside of the gospels abandons such individuals

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and therefore their lifestyle which starts out atheistic becomes sexually immoral. There is the engrafting of the homosexual lifestyle conduct and then verses 28-32 a pervasive sickness throughout society in thought and in action which ultimately brutalizes and makes insensitive the moral conscious of man.

Verse 31 even uses the phrase that ultimately the humanistic theology leads to heartlessness. I'm reminded in biblical times that in the city of Rome 30-40 children were left every night at the forum as abandoned. Many of them newborns who were rejected by their father at birth and were left at the forum to expire in the cold night air. Our society is headed for that kind of precipice in its treatment of unborn babies. That will ultimately spill over into this society's treatment of born babies.

The end result of the humanistic lifestyle over a period of time is found in verse 32 "Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die they not only do them but approve those who practice them." A climate of acceptance and a promotion of humanistic values are perpetuated in the society.

The fact of the matter is that to really be human is to be a Christian. The Bible in the last analysis if you define humanism in the sense of standing for human values and human life and what's best and good and highest and most dignified about human life, the Bible is a humanist document in the purest sense of the word. The humanistic philosophy rather than leading to a true spirit of humanism ultimately leads to a spirit of animalism.

A third question I want to raise on the Christian facing the issue of humanism is to identify where the battle lines are between Christians and secular humanists within our culture.

Certainly one area is in the media. By this I mean the print, the broadcasting media that is news related and the entertainment media both in television and movies. If you look at the television media and especially the programming you will search in vein for Christians to be portrayed in a positive light. There are estimated forty million born again Christians in this country. About one fifth of the population is estimated to be born again. It would be nice on some television program to see a Christian presented as something other than a nut of some sort or a crazed murderer who is hung up on fantasies that are repressed because of his religious belief. It'd be wonderful to see a clergy persons represented as some kind of a normal, sane even humorous ordinary human being. Instead of a lecherous religious bigot who is getting sodded on the side or having an adulterous affair.

Television entertainment especially promotes continually a non-Christian lifestyle in regard to sexuality and violence. It has been statistically demonstrated that the majority – approximated two thirds of all sexual liaisons – is inferred on the television screen occurs among unmarried people. By the time the American child is 18 years of age he has watched 18,000 murders on television. It may be debated as to whether or not that's had an impact on the violence in our culture. It might have sewn some kind of kernels there.

I think a fair assessment of what is happening on television in both the news and entertainment is that the Christian value on life, the Christian value on morals, the Christian understanding of God is no, the Christian position doesn't exist at all.

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Maybe that doesn't trouble you. Maybe it wouldn't be if it were not for the basic unfairness of it. And also it calls it to our attention.

In one of his books, Elton Trueblood talks about the lost frontiers. When you lose the frontiers you ultimately lose the home base. Trueblood in that 1950ish book warned the church that its frontiers were in youth and education. And if we lose the war in those frontiers then we will ultimately lose the church.

I think if he were writing that book today he would certainly include the media as one of the frontiers that has been lost to the church, that the church needs to infiltrate back into again.

Another area where the issue of humanism with biblical Christianity is joined is in our whole attitude of our society toward sexual morality. Recreational sexuality versus sexuality within marriage. Living together versus marriage. Adultery, pornography, homosexuality. All these are areas where Christians are joined in the battle with the secular humanists on what is going to constitute right and wrong.

Another area is control of public institutions. The school system. If Christians would put more prayer in their own life – there are many Christians calling for prayer in the school who haven't put prayer in their own life. I think as a political position that unites Christians it's a wise thing to stand for something. Even more important than a non-sectarian prayer before a school day is the issue the courts are dealing with on the denial of Christians to associate and recognize groups on school grounds. Here I think our high school students ought to have a field day. Move in and develop Christian infrastructures on the campus. Lobby for recognition. Have Bible study. Not do it in an offensive turnoff kind of a way or "We're going to prove we've got civil rights! You pagans are going to learn a lesson from us!" Not with that kind of an attitude. But an attitude that is a balance between forcefulness and humility. Sweet reasonableness and Holy Spirit empowerment.

I think we need as Christians to take our ground, to take our stand.

I think also we need to very clearly keep pressing our point that the humanistic lifestyle is a religious philosophy. If the secular humanists are going to be represented in the classroom with their point of view we need to insist as well as citizens of this country that our position be represented.

We need to be sensitive to what is going on in our courts, with our legislature and with our executive branch of government. And simply not as Christians roll over and play dead.

A fourth area where the battle is joined seems over the issue of church and state. America indeed was founded on the principle of religious tolerance. The Christian ought to take a firm stand of an attitude that the state should not be intruding into religious matters. Nor ought one religion even if it is Christianity be able to impose its way of worship upon the population as a whole.

I am more concerned today not about the church intruding into the state but about the state intruding into the church. I deplore Bob Jones University's policy on racial segregation. Inevitably the government in making a case always picks the weak chicken in the group and

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therefore the whole issue of whether or not government funding could be used in student aid at Bob Jones University was decided on the basis of their attitude on the treatment of blacks on campus in terms of forbidding interracial dating and the like. They ruled that Bob Jones religious philosophy was in contrast to public policy and therefore were denied federal student aide funds. I personally wish the University would at this point be Christian in its understanding of racial issues.

On the other hand when you begin interpreting that issue that the state has a right to assert public policy over religious conviction. It is only if our culture keeps going a matter of time before public policy involves the endorsement of homosexual rights. That will especially reach into matters of hiring practices of at least para-church organizations if not the church directly.

Will the church organization or the para-church organization that has clear cut understanding of this matter be denied its rightful place within the matter of government attitude? Salvation Army in New York City chose not to accept three million dollars of aid for the city because it would not give up its policy of refusing to hire homosexual persons who are in a ministry capacity within their organization.

So separation of church and state is clearly an issue of where we ought to be concerned.

A fourth question: what are the dangers that pertain to Christian involvement in political and moral issues relating to humanism?

This is an area that Christians do not frequently talk about. When we talk about engaging the secular humanist it seems to me there are several concern we need to have in respect to dangers that await us as we become involved in the battle in respect to humanism.

One danger that we Christians need to watch out for is that we not confuse the kingdom of God with political activity. We feel if we could just get the right people elected it'll produce a right society. Well it may be that the right persons will effect a great change in society but if we begin to put all of our eggs in apolitical solution we may change outward laws but we still haven't changed the inward heart. I am concerned that we as Christians get tight with a political philosophy and we wind up in our country sort of like Lebanon where there are various warring sectarian factions that have become over the years as much identified with their political view as even more than with their religious view. We ought to be known always and first and foremost as Christians and only then is it appropriate for some other terms be attached to us. The teaching of the millenium in Revelation 20 is saying to us that even if mankind is given an ideal environment where law is rigidly enforced as a rebuke to all immorality and lawlessness people given a chance will still rebel.

We must learn anew "My kingdom is not of this world." While we thank God for America and the privileges it has provided for us as Christians God never gave to America the responsibility for evangelizing the world. He gave that responsibility to the church. We must make distinctions between the church and the state.

We as Christians must abandon the illusion that by political activity we will make a totally just and righteous society. You can never make a righteous society totally when there are

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unrighteous people in it. The best we can do is only make it less unjust. And less unrighteousness.

It seems to me a second danger we need to watch out for is what I might call a foxhole mentality. That is a sense of being holed up and the bullets are whizzing around us and we begin only to communicate with the people that are in our foxhole. The only thing we know about are bullets and grenades. The Ephesian church was a very effective church in confronting ideas that were different from Christ's. But in the course of successfully combating the heresies Jesus says to that church that it had lost its first love.

I find that when I get involved in the support of a political issue it is very easy for me to type cast everyone else that is on a different stand on an issue than me and it becomes difficult for me to reach them with evangelism when I hate them for their position. We need to watch that our voices do not become shrill. We will never win anyone to Christ whom we disdain. If you really disdain someone it's hopeless. You're never going to win them to Christ. We need to evaluate the effect something is having upon us. If in the course of the battle we're getting an emphasis upon the sword rather than the spirit we need to watch that that we do not have a foxhole mentality.

The Lord tells us to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. In having the wisdom that we need let's not grow the fangs of an eagle but let's keep the innocence of the dove.

That brings me to a third matter that we need to emphasize love rather than power. God's way of the cross is always telling us that the way of love is best. It's not a matter of simply throwing our weight around.

This brings me to a fifth question. What compelling reasons force us as Christians to speak and to act on the issue of secular humanism?

My first answer, the reason that begins to force me to speak and to act on this issue, is I think that as Christians we need to be aware of the historical eventualities if we do not become involved. Inevitably in society it would appear that the idea of every man doing what is right in his own eyes may for a time produce a kind of naïve utopianism but ultimately when everybody does what's right in their eyes and freedom goes wild a strong figure will emerge to produce order and a totalitarian state will emerge.

This last election year and the one before that has proven that the American electorate is quick to embrace new figures about which it knows nothing. That is kind of a characteristic of a people who are searching in all directions and ready to embrace a strong voice who presents themselves as having the solutions for the problems in society.

Human rights are at stake in this issue. The rights of unborn children are at stake. The rights of the elderly are at stake. Euthanasia is going to be increasingly battle line. Mercy killing of the aged, the weak, the infirm, all that needs to happen for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. A society that's proceeding at the level we are is opening itself for a totalitarian state. If not that, it is opening itself to moral chaos, which denigrates or takes away from the value of every human life.

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I think also we need to be involved not only because we're concerned by historical processes and degeneration of society but as Christians we need to be involved because we don't make any distinction between the sacred and the secular. I'm glad that the day is past in America in the church where we say what happens in religion is your own private matter and what happens in the church is the church and what happens at work is at work. And they don't meet. We understand. The Protestant doctrine promulgated by Luther and by Calvin that we are responsible to God for all spheres of our life. We make no distinction that *this* is sacred and *this* is secular. But rather all of life is sacred to God and we are to be involved in all of it as offering our life to God in dedication.

The third reason we need to be involved is the family is at stake. There are great forces in our country taking their stab at the family and we need to do everything we can as Christians to place an emphasis and a value upon the family and upon marriage and upon children and upon good relationships in the home. We need to repudiate government conferences on the family that attempt to masquerade the idea that a family unit consists of anything except a married couple or a single parent with children or married couple with children. When homosexual couples attempt to join the conference on the family and when couples in a swinging lifestyle kind of philosophy attempt representation as part of the understanding of the America family. It seems to me at that point Christians have a stake and need to be involved and to make their stand clear.

I think that another reason we need to get involved is that when the people of God get revived they affect society. There is nothing like a revived and involved church to bring blessing upon the whole nation.

A sixth and last question: what can we do? First, we should be praying as Christians. Praying for our country. Praying for the church. Praying for the leadership of the body of the body of Christ and praying about our own involvement of what the Lord would call us to being enjoined on this issue. We need to be people of prayer and people of the Spirit who don't do things simply because they're hot ideas but do them because we have a deep conviction that flows out of our talk with him who sits upon the throne. If our actions proceed out of the basis of our conversation with Christ on the throne we'll have a lot more intelligence and powerful action that will be taking place if prayer precedes our activity,

Another thing that we need to be doing is to stay informed. I've become a relationship fan of Don Wildman and his National Federation for Decency. Sometimes Christians get involved in a controversy and do it with less than all their ores in the water. He was talking about boycotting because of sponsorship of bad moral things on television. I saw him on television – a calm rational guy, really God's David called upon to talk on Goliath. I warmed up to Don Wildman. He made so much sense about the media that I've begun to get his National Federation for Decency monthly. If you've been blasé about what's happening in the media and especially on television, you've got to read what Donald Wildman is saying. It will shake you up real quick and I think it will get you involved. You'll even start looking at the products you're buying and making a statement about that. And who knows? It may even lead you to write a few letters.

I think a third thing we need to do is we need to avoid something. We need to avoid McCarthyism. We need to be careful that we not simply nametag everybody. I've found for example that even a Christian pastor or teacher has been teaching and writing a book on how a Christian husband should love his wife. And maybe that Christian pastor or teacher is giving

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some valid principles that relate psychologically to the happy home and the make up of a happy home. Then someone will come a long and discount that saying, That's just all humanistic teaching. We need to be careful how we throw words around. If all true knowledge ultimately comes from God we ought to embrace knowledge if it comes in the psychological realm or whatever. Because true knowledge is knowledge given by God. We ought to be careful that we're not labeling people because they may have a different way of talking than we do.

Fourth, we need to do something. I don't know what it is but I think each of us needs to do something about some thing. Two weeks from now I'm speaking on the topic of abortion. We need to take positive action and on occasion protest action. Write letters, make phone calls. Especially in our school organizations. Be involved in PTA and every neighborhood organization we can get our hooks into and let our presence be felt. We need Christians running for political office. We should find something to do.

Fifth, We need to take on the servant life rather than the self centered life. We need to not look to our own interest but look to the interest of others. I think the most important thing we can do, perhaps the two most important things we can do is we ought to let the people of God go being the people of God. One of the ways to counteract all that's going on in the culture is to let the church be the church. Let the people of God be the people of God. We put an end to naturalism when people see the supernatural at work. We put an end to the devaluation to human life when we show our value of human life. When we take care of those who are in need and those who are ill and who are going through grief and who are elderly. We put an end to the lovelessness and the harshness in our society when we can show the world the Christ style of love. Let the people of God be the people of God.

Then we always need to be guided by the Spirit because there are people even sitting in this audience that the Lord is going to guide in a way that he's never guided anybody else. He may give you some fresh approach. Some involvement that God will greatly use and bless.

We are facing a religious system in humanism. We are engaged in a spiritual battle. We are wrestling with a different kind of faith than perhaps Christians have wrestled with in centuries past. Although humanism has always been around. Frequently the Christians have taken on other religions. This time we're in effect up against a religion that doesn't call itself a religion. But it is a religion nevertheless. And it is controlled by powers that are not of God. We need to go forth to the battle.

Our gracious Father, we thank you for these moments we have shared together tonight. As we bring these moments of teaching to a conclusion we ask that your Spirit would touch our lives. Teach us in our own life personally as we apply this to stay away from relying upon ourselves and our own wisdom. But to come with new dependence upon you to rule and reign over every area of our hearts. Lord Jesus, so many lives are at stake in the world today both in a physical and spiritual sense. Lord, as your people we know the value of life because we know what you give for us that we might have life. We pray, Lord, that the powers of darkness that we are contending with in this country and around the world will be matched and more than matched by your people and by the Spirit. We pray that the strongholds of the enemy will be pulled down. We pray that even people in very high places who are known for not knowing you will have an encounter with you. Lord, we pray as individuals that we'll see an area we can be involved. Whatever it is, wherever you are

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calling us we pray to do it and to do it with our might. And to make a difference in our world. We pray to have the spirit of Esther who looked at the great challenge against her people and confessed that perhaps that it was for a time such as that that she had been born. We have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. Endue us with your Spirit, Lord, we pray through Christ. Amen.