



Friday, July 17, 2020

SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: An Interview with Kevin Lewis, Pt. 1

NC: Today I am here with special guest, Professor of Theology and Law at Biola University, Kevin Lewis. Kevin, thank you for joining me and our listeners today.

KL: Hey, thanks for having me on. I appreciate it.

NC: Absolutely. Well, Kevin, I know who you are. You've been one of my professors and we've kept in contact over the years, but some of our listeners, for whatever reason, may not know who you are. So take a couple of minutes and share a little bit about yourself, about what you do with your free time and what your areas of passion are.

KL: Awesome. Yeah. I teach at Biola University, been there 28 years now. I teach Theology, Law and Apologetics. And as I tell people, my interests start always with Bible, as the Word of God, and the final say on everything. And then it goes to systematic theology, looking at what the entire Bible has to say on every topic, and then put together. I also teach in the area of the cults of Christianity, heresies, world religions. I teach in the area of how to witness to and deal with people in the occult, so I teach a class called Demonology and the Occult. I also have a law degree. I'm a law professor and I practice in the area of religious liberty law, a number of other areas.

So as a lot of people would say, I start out well with Bible, and then it devolves into heresies, cults, demons and lawyers, so down the tubes from there. As far as passions, it's always to follow the late, great Walter Martin, I had the privilege of sitting under, in the late eighties, before he died. He used to say, the entire world has one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel. The fact is, the death rate has not changed since the beginning. It's still one per person. So if we're serious about the Christian faith - which is Jesus is the only way of Salvation; everyone is lost without Jesus - and there really is eternal conscious punishment apart from Christ, then we have to make the most of our time, because the days are evil.

NC: Well, obviously you've studied a lot of topics and you're passionate about a lot, and that's one of the reasons why I think I enjoyed you so much as a professor, is you're knowledgeable. You really care. But you're kind of in a lot of different areas. And I think we are called to do that as well as Christians. But I just want to get to I think a very relevant topic right now, because let's face it: We live in an interesting time. You're in California, I'm in Nebraska and yet we're still facing so many of the same challenges. But I think today, you're seeing what I would call a divide, and that divide is growing. And I would say there are many divides, but the one I want to talk to you about is, there's a divide between those who kind of view the government as evil, right? I mean, big government – bad; small government - good. But then there are others who are saying, "No, no, you don't get it. The big government; that's our savior. And if you reject

government, then you're just a fool and an idiot. So what is the proper Biblical view of government?

KL: That's a great question. Because you could say the same thing: What's the proper view, Biblical view of the church? What's the proper Biblical view of the family? As I mentioned earlier, the idea, it was proposed back about a hundred years ago by Abraham Kuyper, is the concept of sphere sovereignty. If you actually look in the Scriptures, what you see is God created a number of institutions for the functioning of human life. One is the human family, which has its own duties, headship, structure, and so forth. The church - in other words, you know, how do we get, so, - the family: you've got your day to day life - with the church, you also have headship, you have certain duties. That's how people hear the Gospel, have fellowship, grow in sanctification, do all that. And then you have a third, as far as sovereign sphere, with its own headship, with its own organization and its own duties: civil government.

That's why we see in Scripture, *render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; to God, the things that are God's*. So even though we think about that, it's one of the aspects of that passage, is that what you're dealing is, quote/unquote church on one side, and then, but God has also ordained human government. Again, Romans 13, one through seven is a nice summary of that, where it says, *be subject to the governing authorities, for they are ordained of God*. And there it's important to note, that the institution is ordained of God, not that every government, much less every church or family, is following proper Biblical, moral law of God. What it really comes down to, is that God has ordained these institutions, but what's a proper view of civil government is fairly simple. It's that it starts with - like everything else in this life - everything starts with God, with God's attributes, with God's will, with God's decree.

And so what it comes down to for every human being is, how do I conform to the moral will of God? I mean, that's it. Why? Because God is triune. God is love. God is an eternal, inter-trinitarian, three person love, righteousness relationship. And when He created us in his ontological and functional image, we were designed to imitate that loving, righteous relationship in limited ways, so that we could be happy, blessed, and all these other things. So sin, or unrighteousness, gets in the way. Because of the fallenness of the human race, that's what interferes with our blessedness, our happiness. So instead of having happiness, joy, love, peace - all those good things - we have shame, dishonor, hate - a lot of these things that go on.

So the question is, how do you fix the sin problem with the human race? How do you deal with it? Well, the ultimate way is forgiveness and regeneration, through Christ. That fixes the person. But the problem is that, you know, okay, that's great. But how do you restrain evil, externally? So God, through the Spirit, and through our conscience, and through regeneration, fixes us internally. Well, God has ordained the family and human government to restrain sin and promote righteousness externally. Okay. So this is why you see statements, such as in Romans 13, where it says *the government doesn't bear the sword for nothing*. Now of course, you know, was Nero a righteous leader? No. The point is, is that the institution of civil government, by and large, restrains evil, when it's done properly. Sometimes it does it better than at other times. But you want to see what happens, and proof of original sin and the fallen human race, when prosecutors fail to prosecute people caught doing crimes; people realize that sin and crime have no repercussions. There's no penalty for it, so there's no restraint. And this isn't a commentary on who or what, or was a peaceful or non-peaceful protestor. The fact is, there are places where

district attorneys are not prosecuting crime, so crime flourishes.

NC: Okay. So all that said, how do Christians approach government and policy? Because yes, government is there to protect, and we are to be subject to it, within reason, but I mean, how should Christians approach policy and government? Because there are some who clearly say, as a Christian, vote, get out there and vote. And other people are saying, no, stay out of it all together. You know, do I run for office? No, that's not good. Or, I mean, there's some people who, let's just be honest, they just call names on social media, and think that's their contribution. So how should we approach it as Christians?

KL: Yeah. And that's a great question. And I teach a whole 15 week course at Biola on this, on the theology of civil government. So I'll give you the short version here. The reality is that, you know - Peter said it - we must obey God rather than man, because ultimately every human being, but especially Christians, are going to have to answer to the true and the living God, through the Messiah, that is our Lord Jesus Christ, period. And that there is judgment for unbelievers. There's the Bema Seat for believers. So in the end, we again, what we do as Christians is, we know the moral law of God. We don't sin. Our goal is sinlessness, that we follow God in every way, and so the problem though, is that we've got the commands of God, with respect to the moral law. So what we want is a human government that is perfectly aligned with the moral law of God, where human government should be restraining it. For example, the way classically Protestant theologians have thought about theology of civil government, is that a human government, or civil government, deals with external behaviors and punishments, same thing with the family, but that the church deals with the internal life of man. That's a very general distinction. So this is why also, too, the question is, with respect to civil government, okay, there's the moral law of God. Yeah. But we don't need to take a kid to court. He shouldn't get arrested for lying to his parents. Okay, you committed perjury; you lied to your parents. That's not within the sovereign sphere or scope of duties of civil government. Civil government is supposed to maintain peace and order in society, in God's view.

And this is important, so that the church and the family can operate and do its duties in peace. There's a Latin phrase, it's normally *Jus Circa Sacra*, around the sacred. The government works around the sacred. Okay. And at the same time, if you look at the history of the United States, there's different views of civil government and Protestantism. There's a Lutheran view, a Calvinist view and a Baptist view, and so forth. But frankly, the United States was founded ultimately, I mean you could say, the vast majority had a Calvinistic view of civil government. And the big difference would be when they separate what they called law and Gospel, or two kingdoms, is that the ultimate question is, whether the government can have quote/unquote, a Christian character or duties to it, or whether it's supposed to be neutral. And basically, the Calvinists would say, no, the magistrate, as they say for government, has Christian duties, not to run the church, but ultimately to ensure that we can have a safe, civil, Christian society. So this is why, when we think about it, ultimately law and religion go together. Because everybody who has quote/unquote religion or theologies, that's ultimately everyone, if you're a real believer, you have to answer to God, but a Muslim has a different final authority in the Koran and Sharia law than the Christian does. The Buddhist has a different final authority. The pagan, neopagan and Wiccan have a different final authority. The atheist has a different final authority. So the problem is, when you get into a democratic republic and you're going to say, I want to establish law, the

thing is, what do you vote on?

The fact is Christians, atheists, pagans, and Muslims are never going to agree on ultimate principles of righteousness. So what's God's solution for this? It's called the Tower of Babel. He separated people into different nations, and Psalm 33:12 says, *Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord*, because when you follow real righteousness, you get real blessedness and peace. So what you need are the majority of people that actually believe the law of God, and you want the wise people to know, not to have the state legislate the church, or the church run the government, that you have these steps, these proper division of sovereign spheres. And that was the genius of the Christians that created the United States government, who at the time of the founding, you had a group of people in the nation that were like 98% self-described Christian, and 95% of those were Protestant. So they brought their Protestant theology to America and set up, that for example, original sin, people unregenerate are basically selfish and have to be restrained. They need regeneration. So what was the result of that? Separation of powers. You don't want to give the King too much power. You want to separate these sovereign's fears and these branches of government, so they can keep check on one another, because you don't put too much trust in one person or group. [Right.] So these are the kinds of things, theologically, that people thought about before.

NC: Kevin, you used a word a minute ago, *sacred*. So let's just talk about the sacred. Let's talk about the church, because today it seems again that the government is at war with the church and the church is at war with the government. And I think a lot of Christians are confused. How should the church respond to the potential overreach of the government right now? I mean, they're getting, you know, we're allowed to gather to protest, but we're not allowed to gather to worship. So how should the church respond to the situation at hand?

KL: Okay. And again, great question. I could give you about a 30-hour answer to that. The reality is, this is exactly why Christians should form Christian nations, and have Christian leaders in their government, who are wise and know how to run government. When you talk about how the church should respond, there's sort of a Biblical ought, and then there are limitations, by our current tax laws and restraints, for churches to speak out on things. Number one, and this is important, because it's the last about 40 or 50 years, where we see technically Protestants, and certain fundamental Protestants, saying that Christians technically have nothing to do with government. Okay. That's a cultural fundamentalism approach generally, but it's also a classic Anabaptist approach. The classic Anabaptist approach is there's two kingdoms: God's and Satan's. The church is God's kingdom. And the government is Satan's kingdom. That's the historic Anabaptist view. And that's why these Anabaptist groups in Europe were being persecuted, because they were considered antinomians; they didn't want to participate in government; they were against government. And this was the group that wrote the letters to Thomas Jefferson, or we see the Danbury Baptist church say, "Well, gosh, you know, because I wrote to Thomas Jefferson and said, 'Hey, are we going to be persecuted there? You're going to intrude'". And that was the wall of separation language that Jefferson wrote back, "No, the government can't intrude into your church affairs".

So we see these Anabaptist groups like the Mennonites and these other groups, that set up these separatist communities. So the point is that, when you think about what should churches do

about it, you're going to have different answers to that. But the reality is that one, probably the biggest problem that I see with the church, is that we have gone right back as Protestants, to a Roman Catholic view of calling and vocation. And that is, that calling doesn't just mean becoming a pastor; every Christian has a calling and that can be to be an artist, a judge, a lawyer, an engineer, whatever it's to be, and that you glorify God in that particular vocation, and your life as a Christian. But the problem is, you ask someone, "Well, should someone have a calling to be an artist?" "Well maybe, maybe, maybe." "Well, how about a lawyer and judge and politician?" "Oh no. Because government's evil". So then what? So the fact is that's a relatively new view in church history and theology. You go back and look at the older Protestant systems of theology, there are these clear views on what civil government meant, and what the magistrate does, and what the duties are. Book 4, Chapter 20 at Calvin's institutes is all about civil government. Luther wrote extensively on civil government. So you go back, actually find out, it's literally about the last 50, 60 years that we see this withdrawal. So the failure that we have seen in the United States; you want to know how we got there: the response of the church is first and foremost. I mean, yeah, every Christian should be involved, because barbarians don't treat you well when they get governmental power; that's the history of the world. People do not, unbelievers generally don't treat believers well, when they get the sword. Okay. And this is why for the history of the church, the goal was to have Christian nations, so that the Christians wouldn't be persecuted. And that we could live for God Biblically, without fear of persecution, being jailed, being fined; so kind of like, you know, what's happening with China, what's happening with a lot of these communist, anti-Christian countries. So this is why number one, whatever you can do, do it.

My brother, my dear little brother, who I led to the Lord 25 years ago, is now the mayor of La Mirada. He's the mayor of Biola University, so to speak. Again, he's my assistant director of the Institute for Theology and Law. So here's one that, yeah, he's not a theologian, he's not this, but he is a lawyer and a good Christian, and he got involved in local government. And now again, you have some really good people running the city of La Mirada, and it's actually according to all the stats, it's the number one, safest city in LA County. Why? Because people get involved in local government, and national government, and state government, and county government. The point is, that *blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord*. And the people who run it have to be followers and believers in God's moral righteousness, and want to follow it with mercy, with justice. And when you have that, again, there's blessedness in society.

Ultimately, the Christian has to say, I must obey God rather than man. And if you think about it, it really comes down to this. So number one, personally, I have to give an account to God for the life I live. So at some point, whether I disobey a pastor, or a parent, or a police officer, or the governor, the point is I've got to weigh every one of those decisions, because God set up those institutions, but they can be wrong, but God can't. So that's where your civil disobedience, or even parental disobedience, or, you know, disobedience to your church leaders, comes in. You have to think through that ahead of time. And ultimately, it's this: human government - and this is every institution, but let's take human government - cannot command what God forbids, and they cannot permit what God forbids. Okay. They cannot forbid what God commands, and so on and so forth. So this is why, if they do, technically they're tyrants at that point; they are acting outside their scope of authority, delegated to them by God. In fact, that's what's important. Romans 13:1 says very clearly, all authority comes from God. So everyone who's a human ruler, and has authority, only has an imputed or delegated authority. And they are responsible for

following the laws of God. And ultimately, they are subject to the authority of God. [Right]. So when they act outside the scope of Biblical truth and authority, they're acting tyrannically.

NC: Wow. If I could summarize what you just said in a couple of words, I would say, it'd be this: do something, but do so through the grid of Scripture, seeing if it's Biblical, and if it's obedient to God, first and foremost. And if I were to add something to it, and again, my words not yours, is pray, pray, pray, pray for our leaders, and pray for wisdom as you make an action.

Our time is almost up, so I just want to ask the question, because I think there are so many Christians who are confused right now about how to respond to racism. First, what is racism, properly defined? Because I think there's a lot of confusion about that. Second, how should we, as Christians, think about and respond to racism?

KL: Yeah. Great question. So the fact is, yeah, racism is always wrong. We judge people by morality, and in other words, by the content of their character. But the point is, human beings look on the outside. God looks on the heart. And the fact is, remember Christian worldview is that we're more than our bodies; a body without a Spirit is what we call a corpse. Okay, corpses don't think, have inclinations. DNA and genetics might give you blue eyes, brown hair, a certain degree of tallness, might even say whether you like certain kinds of foods, but that's not the ground of, whether you're going to be inclined to crime, this, that, or goodness. That's the soul that's developed. And that's why racism is always wrong, because when we're all dead and in Heaven, there aren't going to be black souls, white souls, Asian souls, or anything else. We're going to stand before God, in either righteousness or unrighteousness, cast our crowns before Him. And just say, "I don't deserve to be here. Thank you, Lord."

NC: Amen. Amen. Wow. You've given us Kevin, a lot to think about, but solid Biblical answers. And that's why we invited you here today. Kevin, thank you for your time today.

KL: Yeah, you're welcome, brother. It was great to be here.