

# OpenTheo

## **Conversations in a Crisis: Part VI: Considering Resistance (with Rev Benjamin Miller)**

April 9, 2022



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Faced with our challenge of remaining faithful within and addressing our various contemporary societal crises with wisdom, Christians and churches are fracturing over our differing approaches and postures. My friend Ben Miller suggested that we have a series of conversations, to help us to pursue greater clarity on the principles, virtues, duties, and practices that can equip Christians to meet such difficult times with prudence, insight, and courage.

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### **Transcript**

The following is one of a series of conversations that I'm having with my friend, the Reverend Ben Miller. Ben is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on Long Island, and he suggested in the context of current divisions within the church over political and other issues that we have a wide-ranging series of conversations about issues of Christian ethical reflection, epistemology, charity, obedience, trust, community, and conscience in this context. While our conversations are occasioned by issues such as COVID, on which Ben and I have different opinions, our conversations will not be narrowly about it, but will be a broader exploration of issues of Christian faithfulness in any sort of crisis, some of the principles that should guide us, and some of the practices and virtues that we need to pursue.

Through our conversations, we're hoping to arrive at more accurate and charitable understandings of each other, a better grasp of responsible processes of Christian

reasoning and deliberation, and a clearer apprehension of principles that we hold in common. We invite you to join us for these conversations, to listen to our discussions, and then to share your own thoughts in the comments and elsewhere. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

So Alastair, last time we were talking about how trust and narratives that either reinforce or erode trust, how that plays into questions of submitting to ruling authorities. If we have a system that has been captured by forces of evil, in so many words, how does that make it, how does that change the dynamics of submission and of course of resistance, how distrust can lead to distorted forms of resistance, even as improper trust can lead to distorted forms of submission. So I think the topic now that we can take up, having explored some of that background territory, is just what, in general at least, does principled, faithful resistance to authorities look like? Is there even such a thing? I think it's very easy to have pictures of what that might look like immediately jump to mind, but maybe we could just explore something of the mentality with which we should approach taking a stand in opposition to things that are said or done by knowledge authorities or political authorities, and perhaps even get into some practical strategies for even our own situation, which is ongoing with lots of global goings on in the last couple of years, and many of them continue.

Yes, I think I've found it helpful to start off with some of the boundaries that we have within the practice of submission to authorities and to recognise that even in our process of resistance, that doesn't absolve us from the need to show some measure of submission to lawful authority. And so for instance, you can imagine a situation when your child recognises that you've told them to do something that's not good, or a situation when you're just being a bad parent, and how they can respond to that without just dismissing parental authority altogether. There are ways in which you can imagine an interaction between a child and a parent that responds to some sort of parental injustice that is submissive, and in another way that is fairly clearly rebellious, and represents a dismissal of lawful, divine, lawful authority.

And so that's the sort of thing that we're looking for, I think, in relationship to government. And so, for instance, thinking about some of the boundaries here, I find it helpful to take a statement like the Westminster larger catechisms statement about the Fifth Commandment. What is the honour that inferiors owe to their superiors? The honour which inferiors owe to their superiors is all due reverence in heart, word and behaviour, prayer and thanksgiving for them, imitation of their virtues and graces, willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels, due submission to their corrections, fidelity to defence and maintenance of their persons and authority according to their several rights and the nature of their places, bearing with their infirmities and covering them in love so that they may be an honour to them and to their government.

Now, that's a very broad statement. And clearly, we believe there are cases where there

needs to be some sort of resistance or there needs to be opposition to unlawful commands. But trying to think about how that could occur within an approach towards government and authority that is positive, that recognises that authority has been instituted by God.

I think that is where I would see the challenge. And I think this is an area also where we need to recognise in different cultures and societies, we have different and in different positions in society, we have different degrees to which we can respond and different degrees to which we have power to respond. Your two year old has a very different relationship with parental authority than your 17 year old.

And that dynamic in both cases is one in which there should be a recognition of proper parental authority, but they have a different degree to which they can stand over against that authority and reason with it. And so ideally, what we're trying to explore is a way to increase our agency over against bad exercises of authority and bad authorities without thereby just dismissing the structure of authority. Yes.

So I wonder if it might be important early on to ask the question, whom are we resisting? And this might be a place where perhaps your context in the UK and mine here in the US might be the narrative dynamics might be different because getting back to our last conversation, one of the things that I think I've seen in North American evangelical political advocacy, at least in my lifetime, has been that there's been a feeling I think this is rooted in the Cold War. I think it's rooted in a deep fear of communism that goes way back in our American story in the last century. That sees ideological forces that hate Christ and hate America.

And the deep principles of liberty and justice for which we stand, sees these kind of pervading society and capturing institutions and ultimately capturing political power structures. And so sometimes if you were to ask an American evangelical, what is it that needs to be resisted? They would not necessarily say it's the American government, let's say. They would say it's the forces.

It's almost like they see an occupation force that needs to be resisted. Almost as if there's a sort of this shadow thing that is taking over our existing social forms and government structures. And obviously, along with that, our educational institutions and our media institutions and so on and so on.

And of course, that has been enormously complicated by the sexual revolution and the kinds of various kinds of ideologies that have come from that. And so I think there's often a sense that it's one thing to speak about how you might resist a legitimate authority who's just doing some really unhelpful, oppressive, unjust things. Some monarch, let's say, who is not treating his people well.

But it would be quite a different conversation if you realize that monarch was actually a

puppet in the hands of foreign powers. How then might resistance change? And so I bring this up again just to point out again how the narrative, I think, immediately starts shaping the conversation about resistance. Because it seems like what you've just described, which I absolutely agree with, fits more naturally in the minds of many people in a situation where you are dealing with your authority.

An authority that is actually legitimately lawfully yours versus a situation, again, I'm just talking about the narrative here. I'm not saying I agree with this, but a situation where behind the existing, say, American political rulers, there's all this other stuff to which the only appropriate response can be war. Because that was the evangelical reaction, let's say, to communism in the 20th century was these are our enemies.

They are the enemies of God and the enemies of our country. So I'm sorry I keep coming back to these narratives. I just don't know how to get around them here in the States because they're very much afoot.

And it's certainly not something that's solely on the right. You'll find the same generalized narratives of distrust and delegitimization in white supremacy or in the corporate powers that control society or the various narratives that you have on, other narratives that you have on the left, about the powers that be, the establishment, the man. There's this sense of an agency that is an occupying force that is also pervasive.

It's not something that can be extracted from the system easily. It's something that the whole of the political establishment is a sort of swamp. And that's something that it can be a particular narrative or image that you find more on the right.

But you'll find other narratives much like that, just about any other quarter of the society and the political spectrum. So I think, first of all, we need to consider about what is it about American society and its system that allows for the growth of such distrust? Because that's one of the first areas to actually think about rectifying things. There's something collapsing here or there's something that's never really been built up.

So how would you develop the healthy networks of trust with which to counteract those things? So that more generalized context of distrust is something that seems to be more endemic to the system. And we can often think about, OK, you've got the system over here and you've got trust in another part that's exercised towards that or not exercised towards it. But there's something about the system itself that even within it, I think it's liable to that fostering of distrust.

So the question is, how could you overcome that within the system itself? How could we take agency to be those who actually create context where trust starts to develop? Now, it won't be developed perfectly or fully, but I think that is important. Another thing is to recognize the degree to which trust can be mediated in relationships that are close to the ground. We tend to think in terms of the big government picture and the big

agencies and how we relate to those.

But often the relationship that we have to those is mediated by very specific relationships that we have to faces of those organizations. So if you know someone who is working for some government agency, you can relate to that agency in part through their face and your relationship to them. And likewise, if you're relating to a particular area of academic expertise, you don't actually need to know that area yourself to have a moderation of your distrust of that by knowledge of someone in your church, for instance, who's within that area and who's an expert.

All of these things are some of the ways in which I think we can create healthier dynamics where there's not just that radical distrust. And where those narratives are not just removed, it's not simply that they evaporate and dissipate. We recognize there are ideological forces, there are structural factors.

There are all these sorts of things that do give some degree of purchase for a hermeneutic of suspicion and some degree of legitimacy for recognizing there are power interests here. There are class interests here and things, it's not a level playing field, things are playing out in particular ways. But at the same time, recognizing we can break that distrust down to a more manageable size.

We can see within this structure, it's not necessarily driven all, in most cases, it's driven by something a bit more complicated than malice. It's something that is not necessarily a war of one party upon another. And there are ways in which you can see things from another perspective that enable you to understand where other people are coming from.

And then to actually move towards thinking about how much you take on board some of the concerns that other parties would have without jumping to their ideological responses. But nonetheless, giving them weight. And so my approach generally is to recognize that there are these factors of distrust that are encouraged by and endemic to the system itself.

And there are factors that make that sense of distrust. And it's not an irrational sense. In some cases it is, but in many cases, people are responding to something that's really there.

There's a real breakdown of trust. Trust isn't being built up. There's maybe not the trust to break down in the first place.

And so the question is, how can you get a sense of the shape of that problem that is less generalizing, that thinks, let's tear it all down, burn it all down, and thinks more about where is the healthy tissue here? Where is the unhealthy stuff that needs to be excised? And then once you've done that, I think you can have a more effective response that is not polarized, paralyzed, or paranoid. You know, that's so helpful. And it relates, I've

begun to wonder if what I will just loosely call institution building is not a form of resistance.

And related to that, a real active enterprise of friendship across as much of a spectrum as possible. Befriend, not necessarily intimate friendships, but befriend as many people as you can just so you can get to know what they know. Because the broader your knowledge is, the more I think it enables you to understand, I love that metaphor you just used of where's the healthy tissue.

Because the alternative to getting involved in cultural building side by side with as many people as possible, as many people of goodwill and even people we fiercely disagree with, but through the course of conversations we begin to understand something of what their actual interests are and how they analyze things and why they care about certain things, so that we might be able to find some common ground. Like that's good social tissue. Can we work on that stuff? Because the alternative is, and I've said before, I'm more than mildly nervous about this.

The alternative to that is to just engage in political war, where you win an election, now we won the election, then you took it back and now we're going to take it back and at the end of that, if there even is an end to that process, other than just total social dissolution, the best you can really hope for is we've grabbed the Oval Office for four years, let's impose all we can during those four years until the enemies sweep in and you know tear it all down. Alistair, I just think that whole political program is nonsense. There is no future in that.

I care about who's in office and what policies they're enacting, but if cultural hegemony, to use Gramsci's idea, is a thing, where has God given us local opportunities to participate in cultural building? Let's build institutions. And along with that, I have had so much anxiety calmed in me in the last decade by getting into networks of friends who have opened my understanding of how the world works. They bring their sphere of knowledge and expertise and interest and as I interact with that, I learn more about the world, I learn more about questions I didn't know existed before or maybe ways of approaching questions I didn't know about before.

And they've introduced me to books and podcasts and articles and I've just much wider reading. I don't read and listen in a niche now, the way I once, I didn't realize I was in a niche, but I was. And as my knowledge has expanded, it's enabled me to say about most political questions, you know, that's complicated stuff.

There are a lot of really good questions, some very real problems there. And I'm interested in what I might do about those in my particular situation. I mean, as a pastor, I'm able to have a measure of influence and as a father, I'm thinking about learning more about the questions and possible solutions and then looking at my context and seeking to be a good friend to other friends and other contexts where I might be able to

encourage that brother or sister over there who's building that institution or, you know, has that platform for speech and influence and this is, this is resistance.

It's just, it's refusing to be engaged in that. I really do think it's a posture of just war at this high political level which I think can only be fruitless. I find this in, for instance, the line that you often hear experts differ and experts do differ, but when you've got to a knowledge of certain expertise around a particular question, you realize that they differ in ways where there are clear boundaries, where there will be recognition, mutual recognition of expertise, recognition of when you're dealing with a crack, that some positions, experts differ does not mean that all of those differences are expert differences.

And at a certain point you realize you can actually take a less dogmatic position to a question without feeling that everything is up for grabs, because there are a lot of things that have been narrowed down and you can see different perspectives upon the same question. And there is a sense of anxiety that gets lifted. Whereas people I think who often come to that from outside, and it's always important to take those sort of instincts that you learn in your own areas.

For instance, knowing that you've been in so many situations where you've seen a local situation or something in your church or something in your family really close up, you know the different complexities of the various party interests, etc. And you see someone judging that from without and how badly they get it wrong. And then you take that sort of instinct and you realize, okay, I'm going to be very careful in the way that I judge this situation from without because I've seen how that can go wrong in situations about which I have personal knowledge or I've seen how expertise functions within my discipline.

I'm going to take the instincts that I learned there to apply to other disciplines and in most areas, you'll find that the experts, they differ, but they differ in intelligent ways they recognize each other. They recognize which there's a certain sense of what is expertise, what is not expertise, and there are certain people who are just cranks who like to just dismiss everyone entirely and put them all within a certain camp and when you actually know the experts, they're not all within a single camp. There's a lot of differences within them, within their midst.

And so it's being able to read those sorts of contexts, it enables you to break those levels of distrust down to size. It's not about suspicion anymore. You trust each other, you know that you're experts, but the differences are reasonable differences of perspective.

And that movement from suspicion of persons to differing perspectives, I think is a huge move to make. Another thing, just on your issue of construction. This is again, one of the reasons why we need to be working on creating the foundation within which we can act in a healthy manner in these situations, when things are going well.

If we're going to function well in a crisis, we need to be dealing with things in the good times. And so I think one of the first areas would be, how much is your church and your local community, building healthy relationships of trust with local authorities. So, for instance, one guy who's talked about the fact whenever a new local official comes into office, someone starts off as the new dean of the university, whatever it is, there is this concern to go to that person and say, how can we pray for you? What is something within your area of responsibility that no human being could solve that we can pray for? And these sorts of this sense, we're concerned we want the best for you.

And so often what you have, I think, is this situation where we're instantly complaining to or distrusting authorities that we're not actually invested in them. We've given them no reason to be invested in us. We're just people who complain.

And there's no sense in which we're actually wanting to give them a positive response. If they actually do things that are positive, we're not actually reacting to that. And so they'll end up just serving the interests of the people who do give them those sorts of responses.

But if we're people who are so invested in the local common good that we actually form those relationships and develop them, then when the time comes, when there is something that we're really concerned about, and we need to deal with, we have a hearing, we have trust, we have traction. And we have the means by which to have a response to that that is not characterized by antagonism. And so, for me, these are the sorts of areas where we need to work before that time of resistance, so that when there is need for resistance, we can minimize the pressure that we'll need to exert.

Yeah, that's just excellent. I have an interesting illustration of that from 2020. I have a relative who's in a church in another city, and it's an inner city church with a lot of people from minoritized cultures where they were deeply affected by the George Floyd thing that went down in the summer of 2020.

But the leadership in that church had already established a relationship with someone in the local police force. And so when that whole thing went down after George Floyd was killed, the leadership got on the phone with this, they had a Zoom meeting with this person in the police force, and they were just able to talk through kind of how those local authorities viewed what was going on with the riots and, you know, this person in the police force was interacting with the local police force. They were interacting with how these things would emotionally affect people in this particular congregation and it was just a really, it was a really beautiful example of how a relationship that would have been automatically hostile, if that preparatory work had not been done, became instead communicative and and mutually helpful in a very tense moment.

But as you just said, I mean if that groundwork is not laid in advance and I think that's just sort of across the board in so many different contexts. If you are, if you are not



strengthening relationships before they're put under stress. You can't expect them to respond well under stress.

And that's just so obvious but resistance gets very, it's, it's hard to work out resistance responsibly when you've already set things up to be so hostile and antagonistic because you haven't done, you know, preparatory work and constructive work upstream so I think I think we tend to think of resistance as what happens in the moment of crisis. I think you're pointing out it's just so much more than that. I think also that preparatory work provides a context within which the resistance is seen for what it is.

When resistance occurs, for instance, think about David, David's resistance or his fleeing from King Saul and all the things that happened between Saul and David have a context of David's faithful service of Saul. The fact that whenever he was given the chance to take Saul's life he did not do so and he blessed Saul, he wanted the best for him, he did not seek to be his enemy. And when you've seen all of that, everything else makes more sense.

And I think we see that more generally in scripture, if our primary political task as Christians is praying for authorities. Because that's taking place in the context where we're actually engaging in our primary political task, we're engaging with the throne of God and we're seeking for the good of our society, we're seeking that good as it's represented by flawed human beings in positions of rule. And once that is seen as the context, when there is a moment of resistance, it's seen against all this background of submission, honour, seeking the best, and it becomes clear what it is.

It is not just overthrowing the fifth commandment and our duties towards superiors, but it's actually an expression of our concern for the good. And it's something that is of one piece with everything else that we've been practicing in our pursuit of a healthy common good, a society that is one of trust and just functioning well. I have a very specific area where I maybe we could talk about applying what you just said.

And that is just our speech about authorities in general. I don't know if this is just me, but I have gotten so weary, Alistair, of constant complaining about and criticizing of those in authority. Maybe because I've had to be a pastor now for 16 or so years, and I don't mind, you know, I don't mind criticism, you better expect to be going to be a pastor.

But you listen better, to your point, you listen better to people who in general are obviously supportive and encouraging and I mean they're invested, there's some buy-in. When those people speak criticism it carries weight. But I just feel so often that evangelical Christians in America have often come across I know this is broad brush but they've often come across as just very shrill, very annoyed, very ready to, they do, there's not a covering of the faults of authorities, I have, there are certain people in my social media feeds.

Now these are intelligent Christians, just about everything they post is anti this or that administration, anti, I mean, through it through the COVID time, I mean it just got it gets to be exhausting like do you ever do anything besides find like the most embarrassing Kamala Harris, you know, video clip and post it for the world to mock I mean is that what are we even doing with that, because after a while, he I who know you and actually respect you don't want to hear anything you have to say politically. I can't imagine how people who don't know you and don't have any context for respecting you, how the only thing you're doing at that point it seems to me is whipping up your own little tribe who kind of hate this or that authority as much as you do that is a, that is not a rhetorical posture from which you can speak with authority to authority, because as you just pointed out, there's no evidence of genuine goodwill and seeking to see the best, putting a putting a charitable spin as much as you can on things, because then when you need to say the word of this is an injustice. You know that back to the civil rights context.

It was in part the honorable manner in which those protesters in general behaved toward the authorities that enabled what they did to have so much power revolutionaries very quickly burn through their, their capital politically and rhetorically, because you can only scream outrage so long before people are just sort of. They're dulled to it. And it's almost impossible to build a functional authority on that basis.

And, indeed, again as we discussed a couple of conversations ago, had David just taken that position of direct confrontation and resistance to solve comprehensive resistance. He could not have built his own reign on that basis. And exactly the one verse that really comes to mind here is in Hebrews chapter 13 verse 17 obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account, let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

And I think there's a lot to reflect upon that not just for church authorities, it's definitely important that having been the son of a pastor, you realize the amount of misery that churches can put their pastors through and I'm sure you know this firsthand this no amount that people just presume upon the emotional burden that pastors can take, and the groaning that occurs as part of that task is incredible and you think about that for politicians as well they also have to give an account of their rule. They're also ministers of Christ bearing the sword and our desire should be that the exercise that well and without groaning we we're on the side of good order, and we're on the side of those who are exercising authority in Christ's name, and as much as possible we want to build up a good authority and so any way in which we can lean into their support their authority, build it up and honor it. But focus on the good things.

Yes. And then, with that capital that we built their deal with the dysfunctions. It's like a house that has some structural huge structural faults, you'll have to have braces and other supports on those areas that are able to hold something up.

If you're going to deal with those areas that need to be broken down. And so as much as possible we're trying to create those braces and for authority, where we see it functioning well, where we see people trying to exercise goodwill, even if they have a misunderstanding. Yeah, we're doing whatever we can to lean into those areas in order that we can actually deal with the areas where there are dysfunctions.

And again, I'm reminded of a piece that Scott Alexander talked about and he talked about free speech, the way in which we tend to think about free speech, without considering the capital with which free speech operates free speech is not entirely free to actually speak your mind to be candid, you have to have earned a lot of trust and goodwill with people. And so the ability to have a society of free speech is a large part. It's on the basis of a society of trust and goodwill, where you've invested in each other where you've sort of common good with others.

And then at that point, you have gained the capital with which when you speak with candor on an issue of concern, you may be heard, because people know that it's not out of antagonism to them. It's not just about your private or your polarized party interests. There is a sense, we're saying this because we believe something about the common good is at stake.

Yes. And this is not just to reject or dismiss or to throw your way as a neighbor, we actually love you and we're expressing this in a way consistent with all of that. And there are always ways to be working that out where you are.

And you know as we said a number of times throughout these episodes I think that's another good reason to probably limit social media advocacy. It just does not have. It doesn't lend itself toward the dynamics of what you've just been describing of building capital with, you know, with people who with whom your life has enough contact that they can they can they can get a sense that you're invested in their well being and in the well being of other people.

You know it's been interesting over the years I've had some local friends with whom I have enormous say political differences, but it's been odd how much that doesn't really matter because it's just not, we have conversations about it but it's not what defines our friendship at all. And so I think just live up live a month, and it sounds, it sounds so almost put, put your head in the sand is what you're saying but it's just live where God has put you live with your people and make, make it known by your words and deeds that you are, you are for them. And I think that's something that puts people off their guard when you actually are prepared to show trust towards them as someone who clearly holds different political opinions from them and who has Christian commitments that will be at odds with their secular values, the fact that nonetheless, you actually willing to believe that they are a person of goodwill, and that there is a basis for common action.

And they're just not expecting that, which is tragic in itself, but I do think that there is a lot of potential here that just has not been explored in many cases. And so, in the same way I think we've talked about the importance of authorities building trust and earning or earning trust from others by giving reasons and trying to explain things and bring people to a position where it's very clear that the authorities want their good. There has to be action on both sides, ideally, and a willingness to give trust a willingness to be persuaded and a willingness to engage with people that have differences with us in a hopeful manner.

We believe that God can bring things about, even with our adversaries, God can cause the enemies of a righteous man to be at peace with him. And that is something about I think a hopeful Christian engagement that is not explored enough. Now I think we do need to get into some of the more specific questions of, okay, we've done all of those things we've taken the right approach.

And nonetheless, we're being forced into something that's clearly unjust or, and we're having some pressure put upon us in a way that clearly goes contrary to our faith. What now. I was thinking the same I mean, what about situations where government regulations that affect worship let's say or you're in a situation where in an employment context, this happened a lot during COVID where you have a principled view about, let's say vaccines and yet you're vaccinated these kinds of situations, how do we, and this might be a perhaps a whole other conversation but just how do you think about maybe the jurisdictional lines there and how you how you respond as an individual within those jurisdictional context and in some cases conflicts like perhaps between something that the state is saying and and the church being affected by that and those sorts of things.

I've spent a lot of time, honestly, over the last couple of years just trying to clear up some confusion for people about where they're sometimes we can create a situation we feel a need for resistance and we've actually misdefined the situation. There's really not a need for resistance for example the fact that in general the fact that a government agency or actor would impose public health regulations, you know, during a time of public health crisis. That's not an infringement of conscience.

That's a way of protecting people's bodies and public gatherings of bodies, and I don't think that churches can. I really don't think the churches can just wave some kind of jurisdictional card to say we're exempt from all of that anymore that we're exempt from any other regulations that are clearly just protecting people's health and safety, or, or even me this is the kind of thing you get into where it's not an active resistance for a family to refuse to report something as an abuse situation that's happened because this is a family affair and we're like resistant to CPS being called in or resistant to government actors being brought in to investigate. Well that's just in my judgment that's just a confusion about jurisdictions that's not a context in which resistance is even really an issue because these are government actors doing something entirely within their

jurisdiction to do so sometimes I think we can create resistance questions where some clear jurisdictional understanding would probably make them disappear.

And then I think there is the ways in which we can de escalate a situation or break it down to a more manageable size, there are occasions where we have onerous restrictions. And there's a certain degree of creativity and imagination that enables us to circumvent without destroying the spirit of the law, but to get around some of the more onerous restrictions. And so, in those sorts of cases, we have a number of different things that we can do to respond, which don't instantly involve with jumping to resistance so it's first of all consider what options we have.

And ideally what we've tried to do is to create a significant repertoire of responses, so we can respond by appealing to authorities that we've developed goodwill with and significant capital. And so when we do raise our concerns, they're going to give us a hearing they know we're not just doing this out of an instinctive hostility. And then that point where, okay, we can't get around these, the restrictions are going to apply to us but what is a creative or imaginative way that we could continue to do certain practices, without falling foul of this.

Right. And also thinking about ways in which we can think about the application of the law. And there are.

I mean I think this is an interesting. There are interesting examples of this in scripture. So, for instance, the story of Esther and Haman, and the law that's made to kill the Jews.

That law is never excised from the books, that law remains on the books. But what happens is a competing law comes against it and goes toe to toe. And so extreme that people know, okay, there's a signal being given.

We're going to disregard that first law and so there's a sort of epigenome genome behind the genome of the law that determines when certain laws are going to be activated or not. Yeah, and often I think you'll find the same thing with local authorities, there are ways in which there is this sort of epigenome of how laws are applied. And the same thing if you have your boss.

Ideally you want to have good will with your boss so that when you're a crisis arises. And for instance, HR has this new policy on LGBT Q stuff and how you going to stand with regard to that you're not going to sign up but is there some way that you can make some under arrive at some understanding with them. Having developed goodwill, and where you say okay I'm not in this situation to engage in hate speech.

I'm not wanting to be hostile towards people I have these clear convictions. This is how I hold these convictions, and I hold them in a way that I aim to be loving to my neighbors, and, and I have a track record of this, this is the way that I've acted in these situations

before and when people see that often you'll find there are ways in which the burden of the law can be diminished, or there can be circumvent people find ways to circumvent it, or they'll find other ways of avoiding subjecting you to the full force so again, we're dealing with situations, none of these are is a silver bullet. But what we're looking at what are the avenues of escape that might be provided to us before we go for the more extreme options, and there are many of those avenues that we don't want to miss.

And we want to make sure that early on we provide ourselves with these. So if you're working in a workplace where you might have this sort of legislation coming in. Ideally, you want to have these good relationships that give you the capital with which to work.

And you'll find that those. You'll often have situations where people will make allowances in those sorts of scenarios. Yeah, we actually had an interesting situation along those lines with our landlord during the COVID situation so we, we did not we were not able to be in our church building we rent a church facility from a Lutheran Church.

We weren't able to be in the facility for a number of months, but we paid rent, all during that time. Just as a gesture of goodwill to our landlord, because we knew that, you know, they, they can use the money. And then when we came back into the building, they had to check certain boxes of what they required in order to have public meetings going on in their building, but they were very very hands off with us, basically we're stating what our policy is but what you do and your worship services up to you.

And I speculate about whether there was some correlation between the fact that we had taken good care of them financially during the months when we couldn't be renting actively from them. And then they were very gracious with us and giving us some room to to maneuver on, you know, some of the policies in the building later. And I think what maybe the flip side of what you're saying is what we are absolutely not doing is establishing this provocative stance, I think sometimes resistance movements are almost hoping for for a clash with the authorities I mean you see this in protests where the point of showing up at this protest is to get arrested.

And if you don't show up on the news as being arrested, then the protest wasn't didn't have the rhetorical force that that you wanted that to me is just something that kind of spectacle that sort of grandstanding is at the other end of the spectrum from what you're describing which is we're seeking every opportunity to be in a cooperative mode with authorities. Now there might come a point when you just can't obey Jesus anymore and be obedient to this authority and those times may come and then courage is needed. But to not have at least a mentality that's looking for every opportunity to not have it come to that seems to me, one wonders then what what's the end you're seeking.

I think the distinction that you make that between the sort of high handed and provocative conflict seeking resistance, and the sort of ways of circumventing or or

technically complying, but recognizing okay, we're going to go no further than we really have to with these onerous laws, we're going to find ways around them we're going to be creative and imaginative, but we are not going to have a high handed showdown with the law. I mean it's like a situation of speeding and most people have sped at certain points in their lives. Now, there's a difference between doing that accidentally or doing it in a situation where okay you need to get to the hospital quickly.

Some reason for instance, those sorts of things are understandable and within the law makes allowances for that, right, what the law does not allow for is the sort of high handed. I'm going to speed in this area to have a showdown with the law, right, to see if the law will actually respond. It's like the.

Again, it's the child that wants to test the parents boundaries and directly doing that, rather than the child that fails in some, maybe they forgot to take their muddy shoes off and they're walking through the house and their parents told them not to do that. Okay, they made a mistake, you deal with that in a very different way from the child that just stubbornly refusing to remove their shoes and just tromping through the house trying to make as much of a mess as they can. There is a very different sort of approach to the law in those cases.

Yeah, and I think we have, this is one of the problems I think that we have with the sort of COVID situation leads to a situation where there are lots of these different potentials for showdowns. Lots of these different cases where there are vague laws that being applied in inconsistent ways, where the government becomes like it's a sort of extension of a large TSA, where there are all sorts of different ways in which its authority is diminished, because its authority is not being evenly enforced. Yes, there are ways in which it just could not enforce its authority effectively.

And so a lot depends upon how people respond to the spirit of the law. In that situation, are they seeking showdowns with the law, or are they trying to uphold the law as much as possible while recognizing okay, these, there can be limits to the ways that these apply, I can recognize in my situation that, okay, maybe there are ways that I'm going to find as many ways to avoid having my kids masked as possible. Because I just don't think that's good for them.

And I want to make sure that if there's any way I'm not wanting to break the law as much as possible. I'm wanting to avoid that. And where there are situations where suppose I feel that I must break the law.

I don't want to show down about it. I don't want to have a high handed resistance to the law. And that I'm going to do the absolute most I can to avoid that sort of situation, and show my respect for the law.

And while saying, okay, this is a point to which I cannot go. And I think you'll find the

same thing in many situations in schools, for instance, where, yeah, if you have a very healthy relationship with your kids teachers. When you're resisting their position on teaching them about certain issues of sexual education, they will be a bit more receptive to what you're saying because you're supporting their authority wherever you can.

And on this particular issue, you're wanting to avoid as much as possible to having a fight. But you're petitioning them first. Is there some way that we can avoid this situation? Because I want to support your authority, I don't want to clash with it.

Is there some way that you can make an allowance? Yeah, well thinking maybe if they're not going to be receptive to that, is there some way I can work around this take my kid out of school on the particular days, and it takes creativity at some points, you may have to come to a more direct confrontation but having taken all those steps. First of all, that confrontation is seen for what it is. This is not something that was precipitous, this is not something that's just about being provocative, but it's responsibly engaged in form of focused resistance to an authority that nonetheless you want to affirm as much as possible.

But you can see there again, that's just excellent stuff. And I, but you can see there again how something we said in the last episode about narrative framing kind of sets you up for one or the other. Because what you're describing there is the kind of principled questions and challenges to things that are being said or imposed where, but within an overall affirmation of the good of, you know, the social order within your op within what you're operating, as opposed to this kind of deep, deep, acidic hermeneutics of suspicion toward the, the delegitimizes the whole thing because we take, take the coven regulations for example I mean, perhaps you and I could stipulate that much of what went on from from governments in imposing policies about COVID I mean it, a lot of it came off as very efficient clumsy and bureaucratic and, you know, ham fisted and.

But I heard totally different rhetoric from people who could see all of that and started looking for creative ways to say let's maneuver within this and basically act with as much freedom as we possibly can without brazenly defying the authorities. You know, I certainly did as a parent and pastor versus that idea that the coven regulations were one example of this occupying force. And so, every coven regulation then became like an opportunity to further.

I mean, I'm not sure how to put this but like, make an obscene gesture at the man. And I heard Christian pastors speaking like this like to the point where if you are not willing to have that kind of brazen spectacle, you know, rise to challenge these you know malevolent forces that are, you know, of biotechnology, you are complicit with them. You know you're not being a good shepherd because you're not thundering against this stuff.

And I just it was it was amazing to me like once you question the underlying narrative of that kind of brazen challenge. It just started to look kind of silly. Like these are



complicated times, public health crises first of all it wasn't all that well anticipated and then people are scrambling at the highest levels down to the lowest levels of how to respond to it.

So a lot of patience is needed, there's gonna be a lot of stupid stuff that's handed down, we're gonna have to deal with. But we've not had the experience of dealing with something like this before so science is always going to be developing and and public authorities, not necessarily competent at the best of times. So is, so is this the moment to stage the great you know standoff with you know whatever this thing is you you've dreamed up as kind of like the monster enemy it just seemed like a very inopportune moment for that kind of brazen challenge and I, the whole narrative is just in some ways so, so many things got lumped into this overarching, I mean look I think there is a real danger of biotechnocratic control, I'm very awake to that.

This just seemed like an awfully poor time to stage the great coup. I think the concern is, I mean I have many of those concerns about biopolitics and biopower. And those concerns are not irrational concerns in a time like ours and it will not be, however, for the most part, a matter of malicious forces directly trying to move us in that direction it'd be more a matter of sleepwalking into this.

We're just not alert to the fact that these dangers lie on the other side we become so fixated upon this immediate threat that faces us that we're making all taking all of these risks in this other area. And so that is a genuine concern and there are, there are I think it's important to raise that concern to articulate it and actually to think about how we might deal with that, without on the other hand just dismissing these other concerns that would seem to And that's one of the dangers that we have with big narratives when you have these big narratives, heroes and villains, and that sort of tidy narrative framing. It's difficult to recognize just the complexity and just the entangled and choices that people have to make in situations where there's little information that's clear and accessible to them.

They're going to have to make decisions that are imperfect. And somehow we have to work with that. And so, being able to address the dangers, speak clearly about the dangers without actually taking a polarized view to it.

I think is important in those sorts of scenarios. I think the other thing that we, we have in these situations is the ability to have different levels of resistance enables us to recognize where we have resources that we might not otherwise have recognized, because if you've got a big narrative and everyone's within this particular group is malicious. You often fail to recognize that many people within that group will share some of your concerns if you voice them in the right way.

And so I think for instance of occasions within scripture where you have complicated relationships within oppressive parties. Think about the relationship between Elijah and

Ahab being moderated in part by the presence of Obadiah. Or think about the way that the oppression of the law concerning the worshipping King Darius for 30 days is moderated by the fact that King Darius is actually a friend of Daniel.

Yes. And there are ways of working with that. In the same way you might think about the relationship between Mordecai and Ahasuerus.

Ahasuerus makes this terrible decree, but recognizing the different parties involved and the ways that Esther actually has the ear of the king, and Mordecai can actually end up making this law. I mean the last chapter of Esther is a surprising one. It's about tax policy.

And you realize this tax policy is actually the answer to one of the problems that you have early on that led to the destruction of the Jews, because the attempt to destroy the Jews was presented as a sort of fiscal policy, a sort of plunderous fiscal policy. And what's the alternative to that? A good tax policy. And when you recognize that you can actually deal with many of these things within the system, that there are laws, there are structures and institutions, there are allies, there are alliances to be formed, then you're not in that instinctive position and posture of resistance.

You're recognizing, okay, there's actually a lot that we can do once we know what's going on on the ground, once we know that these concerns that I have, for instance, about biopolitics are shared by many, even within government itself. And maybe I need to think of ways in which I can support those forces, and maybe be someone who speaks in a way that, having lowered the tone, having lowered the sort of fiery antagonism, can actually receive a hearing from people who might otherwise have instinctively taken a posture of resistance to me, because they presumed that I was taking a posture of resistance to them, when there could be an alliance made. Yeah, that's just so helpful.

I mean, and I was just thinking as you were describing some of those Old Testament examples, how much of Jesus' ministry and the early church's ministry had pretty cordial relations with Romans, the Roman soldiery, you know, centurions and so on. How often Paul benefited from friendship with, or at least cordial relations with Roman officials and pro-convulsion. And even family relationships.

Yeah. I think the other thing is seeing the way Paul is able to be shrewd and cunning in the way that he uses rivalries within political authorities. So the way that he addresses the Sanhedrin and sets the Sadducees and the Pharisees against each other.

He's a troll. He actually is very effective and he also is able to, I mean we also recognize for instance, there is the fact that the Sanhedrin sentenced Christ to death. But there's also Nicodemus in there.

Mm hmm. And there's Joseph of Arimathea and there are these other agencies at work

that make the picture more complex. Even Gamaliel.

Yes. And it is, once you look more closely, I think this is also one of the reasons why the more close you get to people who are working within these institutions who are relevant experts, who are authorities, the more you realize they actually don't fit the narrative, the big, suspicious narratives. Yes.

But they do give us a sense, okay, there are these malicious, there are these negative forces at the very least. Often you'll find there is some hostility or malice there. And yet there are points of traction within the system that they can be dealt with.

And there I think also you find again and again that Christian organizations are helped by knowledge and proficiency in the law. Knowing people who are legal experts, having advocates who are presenting cases for Christian freedoms. Yes.

That is so important within every country. Support organizations that are trying to address laws that are coming on the books and try to create ways in which churches can respond and increase knowledge of the law by the people who have to navigate it most. And all of that is something that we have at our disposal, but it requires a bit of wisdom.

We have to be wise like serpents. Agreed. Yeah, absolutely agreed about legal advocacy, because people that are trained in that will also go to tell you what your options are not, keep you away from the crazy stuff.

You know, this is what the law provides, it's work within actually systems that on balance often function pretty well. For every story you hear about crazy abuses, on balance, these systems of laws provide so much help and support and infrastructure. And one other quick comment I would just make would be I think it's also good just keep reading a lot of history, because the more you see how people work these things out in historical context where you know I've wanted to tell people in the last couple of years.

There have been a lot of rulers in history who were just thugs. If you disagree with them, they would just take off your head. We should thank God for the times we live in it's fairly peaceful, really.

Our oppression that we suffer is relatively mild and it just gives you some perspective and gives you some, some examples of the kinds of serpentine wisdom you've been describing of how to maneuver within tough times. You know you got John Calvin out there in his cave administering a Lord's Supper in France. You know, good stuff to read about.

So, I'm reminded of that quote from a man for all seasons. So now you give the devil the benefit of law. Yes.

What would you do, cut a great road through the law to get off the devil. Yes, I'd cut

down every law in England to do that. Oh, and when that last law was down and the devil turned around on you, where would you hide Roper, the laws all being flat.

This country is planted thick with laws from coast to coast man's laws, not God's. And if you cut them down and you're just the man to do it. Do you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then.

Yes, I'd give the Lord, I'd give the devil benefit of law for my own safety sake. And so I think Christians have these resources that we need to work with. And if we end up resisting them will actually find ourselves poorer off, particularly within countries like the US and UK where there has been this long legacy of Christian Christians involved in the law, seeking to develop a legal structure that's that maintains Christian freedoms and goods within society.

There's a lot to work with that. And so as much as possible we should become adept at doing so. And when we do come to positions of resistance.

I think often we'll find that we can take stands of resistance on the grounds of law. And I think you see that in the civil rights movement I think you also see it in some of the healthy forms of resistance to covert excesses, and where people have actually said okay let's deal with this in the courts. Yes, because we actually have means there to actually attack these abuses, without actually overthrowing authority we're appealing to authority as a means to address its own abuses.

And there I think we'll often find ourselves with the resources that would spare us from having to take a more antagonistic response and preserve the social order. And that's just something that I think people on the right and the left just so very much need to hear very much agreed.