

Topic: Early Church & Government

English search terms:

- Searched by reading through Acts to identify all instances of early church interaction with government. Then read through all of the epistles and, if they addressed government in some way, situated them in the Acts timeline. Finally, included the various Roman emperors and their dates of rule.

Original language search terms:

- n/a

Scriptures (58 passages)

- *Gaius, Caligula - Roman emperor (37-41 AD)*
- **Acts 1:1-8.** In Jerusalem. Jesus is risen from the dead. He gave his apostles “orders” and spoke to them about the “kingdom of God.” The apostles ask if now is the time that God will restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus responds that they will receive power when the HS comes on them to be His witnesses throughout the earth. It seems that Jesus answers, but not directly. God is not going to restore the kingdom they’re thinking of, but He is going to bring his kingdom. And it is through the gospel to all of the earth.
- **Acts 4:1-37.** In Jerusalem. Peter & John preached in the temple after the lame man at the gate was healed. The priests & Sadducees were disturbed that they were teaching “in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” So they put Peter & John in jail. Thus, the religious authorities had some sort of civil authority in Jerusalem. Peter & John stood trial the next day in front of the rulers, elders, scribes, high priest and “all who were of high-priestly descent.” They ask by what authority they have done this healing. Peter says it is by Jesus, “whom you crucified.” He addresses the rulers very directly about their sin. And he proclaims Jesus as raised from the dead and the one who alone gives salvation. The “Council” (Sanhedrin) confers as to what to do. The fact that the lame man was standing there healed prevented them from doing anything too punitive. The Council warns Peter & John not to speak any more in Jesus’ name. Peter & John respond by saying, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20). The Council threatens them again, but they had no basis on which to punish the apostles. So they let them go. In response to the arrest and threats of the Council, Peter & John went back to the church and told them what had happened. In response, “they lifted their voices to God with one accord” in prayer. The church prays and declares that Herod & Pontius Pilate (both working for Rome), and the Gentiles, and the peoples of Israel were all against Jesus. But these rulers did what God had already purposed to be done. God was sovereign over these rulers and accomplished His purposes through them. The church prays that God would see the rulers’ threats to stop speaking in Jesus’ name, and to give the boldness to continue to speak in Jesus’ name with all confidence, and accompany their proclamation with healing, signs and wonders in Jesus’ name. In response to their prayer, the meeting place was shaken, the church was filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. Additionally, they lived in incredible unity and care for one another.

- **Acts 5:12-42.** In Jerusalem. The apostles continued to speak in Jesus' name. Incredible signs and wonders were taking place. The church was in one accord. There was a sense of awe about them; nonbelievers were a bit afraid of them, but respected them. Still, many people were coming to believe in Jesus. Out of jealousy, the high priest and Sadducees put the apostles in a public jail. But in the middle of the night an angel got them out and told them to speak in the temple again in Jesus' name. And so they did. The Council assembled to try them. But they weren't in the jail. The guards found them in the temple, teaching again (This must have been its own sign to the Council). The guards brought the apostles before the council, but they were careful when they did it because they were afraid of the people. The Council is upset because the apostles have disobeyed their order not to teach in Jesus' name, and the apostles also have been blaming the Council for Jesus' death (according to the high priest). Peter responds by saying "We must obey God rather than men." He then goes on to proclaim the gospel, and again says that the Council did put Jesus to death. The Council gets furious and wants to kill them. Gamaliel talks them out of it, saying that perhaps these guys are a flash in the pan. But if God is with them, they will be fighting God. The Council took his advice and only flogged the apostles. They ordered the apostles to stop speaking in Jesus' name. And then they released the apostles. The apostles left, "rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name." And the apostles continued to preach in Jesus' name in the temple and from house to house.
- **Acts 6:8-8:4.** In Jerusalem. Stephen, one of the newly appointed leaders (deacons?), was preaching in Jesus' name, performing signs and wonders, and defending the faith to men from a synagogue. They couldn't cope with Stephen's arguments, so they began to spread lies about him which reached the Council. False witnesses appeared before the Council, accusing Stephen of blasphemy against the temple and the law. Stephen appeared before the Council, visibly filled with the Spirit. He preached the gospel to them, firmly connected in the OT witness, conversant with the Council's theological/historical position. He noted how Israel initially rejected Moses, but then Moses led them on God's behalf. And Israel still resisted and disobeyed Moses. Then he accused the Council of doing the same to Jesus. Stephen says that Jesus is God's deliverer yet they murdered Him. The Council got furious. Stephen has a vision of Jesus as the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. The Council kills Stephen by stoning. In the course of his stoning, Stephen prays for their forgiveness. As a result of this event, "a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). Saul, who was at Stephen's stoning, began a serious persecution of the church. But those believers who were scattered preached in Jesus' name wherever they went.
- **Acts 9:1-31.** In Damascus and Jerusalem. Saul goes to Damascus on behalf of the Jerusalem high priest to capture Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem. Jesus appears to Saul and says that Saul is persecuting Him. Jesus blinds Saul, and Saul is taken into Damascus. God asks a believer in Damascus, Ananias, to go and pray for Saul. Ananias doesn't want to because he's afraid. God says that Saul is "a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel" (Acts 9:15). And Saul will endure suffering to do it (Acts 9:16). Ananias prays for Saul, and he regains his sight. Saul is baptized, filled with the HS, and begins preaching Jesus as the son of God in the synagogues. Saul was very successful

in defending the faith to the Jews in Damascus. So the Jews in Damascus decided to kill Saul. He found out about it and escaped the city. Saul went back to Jerusalem and tried to connect with the believers, but they were afraid of him. Barnabas reached out to him and brought him into fellowship. Saul preached Jesus in Jerusalem. And the Jews decided to put him to death, so he escaped Jerusalem and went to Tarsus. At this time, the church in “Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace... it continued to increase” (Acts 9:31).

- **Acts 10:1.** In Caesarea. Roman military man was the door into the Gentile world.
- *Claudius - Roman emperor (41-54 AD)*
- **Acts 11:19-21.** In Antioch. Because of the persecution in Jerusalem, there were believers who were scattered to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. They preached Jesus to Gentiles in Antioch. As a result, many believed. Barnabas went to Antioch, saw their true faith, and then brought Paul along. What resulted was the Antioch church.
- **Acts 12:1-24.** In Jerusalem Herod the king (Herod Agrippa I) decided to mistreat some believers. He killed James the brother of John. This made the Jews happy, so Herod arrested Peter. The church in Jerusalem began to pray fervently for Peter. An angel broke Peter out of prison. Peter shows up at a prayer meeting and they can barely believe he is out. Peter then “left and went to another place” (Acts 12:17). Herod killed the guards who were in charge of Peter.
- **Acts 13:4-12.** In Paphos, Cyprus. Paul & Barnabas preached the gospel to Sergius Paulus, the proconsul (Roman official). The proconsul actually summoned them to “hear the word of God” (Acts 13:7). Paul performed a miracle and the proconsul believed. He was amazed at the “teaching of the Lord” (Acts 13:12).
- **Acts 13:27-30.** In Pisidian Antioch. Paul preaches in the synagogue at the synagogue leaders’ invitation. He says the rulers in Jerusalem didn’t recognize who Jesus was, and asked Pilate to kill him. This was in fulfillment of prophecy. This was God’s plan all along.
- **Acts 13:50-52.** In Pisidian Antioch. The Jews became jealous of Paul & Barnabas because of the crowds they were drawing (Acts. 13:45). The Jews incited leading men & women of the city to run Paul & Barnabas out of the city. They left but they were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.
- **Acts 14:5-7.** In Iconium. Paul & Barnabas preached to both Jews and Gentiles and both believed. But unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and the Gentiles “and the Jews with their rulers” tried to stone Paul & Barnabas. They fled the city and went another.
 - **Galatians 1:4** (49 AD). Paul writes to the churches in Galatia and asserts that Jesus gave himself for our sins to “rescue us from this present evil age.”
- **Acts 16:11-40.** In Philippi. Philippi was a “leading city in the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony” (Acts 16:12). Paul, Silas and his friends (including Luke) led Lydia and her friends into the faith. Then Paul cast a demon out of a girl who was making money for her masters through fortune-telling. They got upset, and went to the chief magistrates and said that Paul & his friends were “throwing our city into confusion, being Jews.” Given Gonzalez’s history of the Jews in Rome, this comment makes sense. These master also said that Paul was “proclaiming customs which it is not lawful to accept or to observe, being Romans” (Acts 16:21). The magistrates had Paul and Silas beaten publicly and the imprisoned them. Paul & Silas sang humans that night. An earthquake hit the prison and shook its doors open. All of the

prisoners' chains came off. Paul keeps the jailer from killing himself, because the prisoners all stayed in their cells. The jailer asks Paul & Silas how to be saved. Paul gives him the gospel. The jailer and his household became Christians. The next day the magistrates sent their police to release Paul & Silas. Paul tells the policemen that he and Silas are Roman citizens who were beaten without a trial. He insists that the magistrates come themselves and bring Paul & Silas out of prison. And they did, because they were very afraid. They had broken Roman law. The magistrates begged Paul & Silas to leave the city. Instead, they visited Lydia and her house church. Then they left Philippi.

- **Acts 17:1-10.** In Thessalonica. Paul presents the gospel in the synagogue for three weeks and persuades some Jews and a large number of God-fearing Greeks to follow Jesus. The Jews became jealous, stirred up a mob and got the city in an uproar. They went to Jason's house, where Paul & Silas were staying. They couldn't find Paul & Silas, so they dragged Jason and other believers out and took them to the city authorities. The Jews accused these men of welcoming the "men who have upset the world" (Acts 17:6). The Jews accuse them of acting contrary to Caesar's laws, because they say that there is another king, Jesus (Acts 17:7). Both the crowds and city authorities were "stirred up" by this (Acts 17:8). Jason and his friends had to pay some kind of bond and they were released. Paul and Silas escaped the city by night.
- **Acts 18:9-17.** In Corinth. Paul proclaimed the gospel in the synagogue. The Jews rejected him, so he began to preach the gospel from a Greek's house next to the synagogue. God gives Paul a vision and tells him that he can go on speaking; God will protect him in Corinth. Paul stayed for 18 months. The Jews then tried to oust Paul from Corinth. They went before Gallio who was the proconsul of Achaia. They accused Paul of teaching against the law. Gallio interrupts them and says that this is not a matter worthy of his time since it related only their religious concerns. The Jews began to beat the leader of the synagogue in front of Gallio, but he didn't pay them any attention.
 - **1 Thess. 2:12.** In Corinth. Paul encourages the Thessalonians. He says that God calls them into "His own kingdom and glory"
 - **1 Thess. 4:15-17.** In Corinth. According to N. T. Wright, Paul's description of Christ's return is described very much like what it would look like for Caesar to make a "state" visit a colony.¹
 - **2 Thessalonians 1:3-12.** In Corinth. Paul encourages the Thessalonians in their perseverance under suffering. They are suffering for the kingdom of God. God will give them relief, and will judge their oppressors upon Jesus' return. Paul prays for their endurance to continue until His return.
- **Acts 19:23-20:1.** In Ephesus. Paul started proclaiming the gospel in the synagogue. Then they rejected him, so he taught in the school of Tyrannus. He stayed in Ephesus for two years. Many were coming to follow Jesus. Magic books were burned by those who had turned away from it. The books were worth quite a bit. Also, little silver shrines of Artemis were dropping in sales. One of the craftsmen incited others of his trade, saying that Paul was taking away their business and was also defaming the goddess Artemis. He claimed the temple of the goddess might be considered worthless and "even be dethroned from her magnificence" (Acts 19:27). A

¹ See "Roman Empire," DTIB, 696.

mob formed. The city started to riot. The mob dragged two of Paul's friends into the city theater. Paul wanted to go in and talk but his other friends wouldn't let him. Additionally Paul had friends who were "Asiarchs," which were political or religious officials. They warned him not to go into the theater. The crowd had become large enough that many people didn't know what was going on. Some people put forward a man named Alexander, thinking the riot was about him. The crowd saw he was a Jew and started to chant "great is Artemis of the Ephesians" for two hours. The town clerk finally got the crowd to calm down and said that they all knew that Ephesus was the "guardian of the temple of Artemis" but that the men they were accusing didn't blaspheme the temple or the goddess. The clerk said that if there were a true offense, to take these men to court in front of the proconsuls. Otherwise they might be charged of a riot. Then he dismissed the crowd. Paul talked with the church, encouraged them, and then left Ephesus.

- **1 Cor. 5:9-6:8.**² In Ephesus. Paul tells the Corinthians that it is to their shame that they take to law courts, ruled by unbelievers, cases between believers. They should be able to resolve these disputes among themselves. In fact, they should simply be willing to be wronged and forgive.
- **1 Cor. 7:21-24.** In Ephesus. Paul encourages the Corinthians to remain with God in the condition in which he was called. Thus, if he became a believer while he was a slave, he isn't required to leave slavery. However, if he can, then leave it.
- **1 Cor. 15:24-28, 50.** In Ephesus. Paul says that at the end of time, Christ will hand over the kingdom to the Father who will abolish all ruler, authority and power. God will rule over all.
- **2 Cor. 10:3-6.**³ In Macedonia. Believers do not "war" according to the flesh. The weapons of the believer do destroy fortresses, but these fortresses are faulty thinking thrown up against the knowledge of God.
- **2 Cor. 11:22-33.** In Macedonia. Paul recounts the sufferings he has endured for the gospel. He has been beaten by both Jewish and Roman authorities.
- **Romans 1:1-5.** Paul says that the "good news" (Rom. 1:1) is about Jesus who can demand loyalty from the whole world. The term "Good news" was used in Rome to describe Caesar's rule.⁴
- **Romans 1:16-17.** Paul says that the gospel of Jesus is "salvation" from God, it is God's justice revealed. Rome's emperor was often described as bringing "salvation" to the colonies they established, because they brought the justice of Rome to them.⁵
- **Romans 12:17-18.** Paul says not to pay back evil for evil to anyone. Instead, "respect what is right in the sight of all men."

² 1 Corinthians was written some time while Paul at Ephesus for the 2nd time; arrival in Acts 19:1

³ 2 Corinthians was written after Paul left Ephesus because of the uproar. Paul was in Macedonia.

⁴ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 695-696.

⁵ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 695-696.

- **Romans 13:1-7.**⁶ Believers are to submit to the governing authorities. God institutes these authorities. To resist this authority by doing evil is to resist God (This doesn't mean not to resist, but not to resist by doing evil)⁷. Paul says to pay taxes. Render to everyone what is due to them. Taxes, custom and honor are appropriate to give to the government. Do good. Do not do evil. Otherwise, governmental discipline is appropriate.
- **Romans 15:12.** Paul says that Jesus, the Messiah, will rule all the nations. He writes this to Romans, and thus makes it implicitly clear that Jesus, not Caesar, is the king of all.⁸
- **Acts 21:10-14.** Agabus prophesies that the Jewish authorities will bind him and turn him over to the Gentiles. Paul realizes that this is what God wants and, even at the objection of his friends, wants to go through with it.
- *Nero - Roman emperor (54-68 AD)*
- **Acts 21:17-26:32.**
 - In Jerusalem. Upon Paul's return to Jerusalem, he finds that his reputation with the Jewish religious establishment was that he was against Jewish customs. In order to allay this suspicion Paul participated with a temple ritual with four other men who were believing Jews. But this action didn't work. Jews from Asia were in the temple, recognized Paul, misunderstood what he was doing, and started a riot. The Jews began to beat Paul and wanted to kill him. The Roman military intervened, stopped the beating, and took Paul into custody. Paul asked to speak to the crowd. Paul recounted his story, affirmed the Jews' passion for God, and then gave the gospel in the context of his own personal story. When Paul mentioned that the gospel was also for the Gentiles, the crowd went crazy and wanted to kill him. The Roman military pulled him away and decided to question Paul by scourging him. As they were about to do this, Paul invoked his Roman citizenship, which required that he be given a trial before punishment of this kind. The Roman military backed off quickly, frightened because they had put a Roman citizen in chains without a trial. Yet they kept him in the military barracks overnight. The next day the Roman commander brought Paul to the Jewish religious leaders so he could understand what the conflict was about. Paul saw that the Jewish religious leaders were comprised of both Sadducees, who didn't believe in the resurrection, and Pharisees who did. So Paul said he was on trial for the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees immediately wanted to acquit him. The Sadducees disagreed so strongly that the Roman commander was afraid the two groups would pull Paul to pieces. So he took Paul back to the barracks to protect him. That night, the Lord spoke to Paul and said that he will witness to the gospel in Rome. The following day Paul learns that the Jewish religious leaders have agreed to a plot to have him killed on the way to another day of questioning. Paul informs the Roman commander, and so the commander immediately sends Paul to Caesarea under the care of Felix, the governor there.

⁶ See "Roman Empire," DTIB, 696 and "Strategic Noncooperation" in *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*.

⁷ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

⁸ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

- In Caesarea. Paul had not broken any Roman laws. Rather, he was just being protected by the Roman government because the Jewish people were trying to kill him. Yet the Roman government still needed to understand the charges being brought against Paul by the Jewish religious authorities. Apparently they were serious enough to cause this disturbance. Paul stayed in Roman custody. In five days the Jewish high priest, elders and their lawyer came to Caesarea to accuse him before the governor. The accusation was that Paul was causing dissension in the Jewish world, and that his a ringleader of a sect of Jews. Paul was threatening the peace that Rome established. Paul defended himself and made clear that he had broken no Jewish laws and had not incited any kind of riot, nor even discussion. These accusations were false. And then he quickly presented the gospel. Felix knew about “the Way” and decided to put off making a decision until the Roman commander from Jerusalem could get there to talk with him. Paul was kept in custody but given freedom to interact with his friends. Later, Felix & his wife had Paul talk with them about faith in Jesus. It freaked Felix out. So he stopped Paul. But then, over a period of two years, he kept on asking for Paul to come and speak with him again. He actually hoped Paul would try to bribe him. Paul never did. Felix’s job came to an end, but he left Paul in prison just to keep the Jews happy. The new governor was Festus. He had spent time in Jerusalem. While he was there, the religious leaders brought accusations against Paul. They wanted Festus to send Paul to Jerusalem to be tried, and were planning an ambush on the way in order to kill him. Festus told them to come with him to Caesarea and they could go to trial there. Paul appeared before Festus in court, and the Jewish leaders accused him of numerous crimes. Paul defended himself, saying he had broken no Jewish or Roman laws, which was apparently clear to Festus, because there was no verdict given. Festus, trying to do the Jews a favor, asked Paul if he wanted to go to Jerusalem to be tried there. Paul said he was willing to pay for any crimes he committed, but his guilt must be decided by Rome. So Paul appealed to Caesar. Festus thus concluded that Paul must be sent to Caesar. King Agrippa and his wife happened to visit Caesarea about then. Festus told Agrippa about Paul’s case, so Agrippa wanted to hear from Paul. Paul shares the gospel in the context of his personal story. Agrippa listens and says that, since he really broken no laws, Paul could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. But Paul did, so he had to be sent to him.
- **Acts 27:23-25.** In the Adriatic Sea. On Paul’s journey by sea to Rome, great dangers ensue in a massive storm. But an angel assures Paul that he must testify before Caesar. So Paul knows they will make it.
- **Acts 28:7-10.** The island of Crete. The leading man of the island, Publius, gave Paul & the shipwrecked prisoners somewhere to stay. And God healed Publius’ father through Paul. As a result, people throughout the island came to Paul to be healed.
- **Acts 28:16-31.** In Rome. Paul finally made it. He was put under house arrest. He was able to stay by himself, but with a Roman guard. Paul presents the gospel to the leading Jews in the city. Some believed, and some rejected him. And then Paul focused on the Gentiles for preaching the gospel. Paul stayed in his house arrest arrangement for the next two years, “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered” (Acts 28:31).

- **Eph. 1:8-10, 19-23.**⁹ The mystery of God’s will, which has been hidden for all ages until Jesus, is that Jesus would be in charge of all things on earth. God exalted Jesus to this position after his resurrection. Jesus is the King over all creation.
- **Eph. 6:5-9.** Paul doesn’t openly oppose the institution of slavery, which is part of Roman society/law. Yet he proposes a radical way to engage in the existing practice. Slave and masters are equal. They both serve Jesus through their work. And they serve each other, mutually submitted to one another.
- **Eph. 6:10-12.** Paul makes it clear that the real struggle that believers face is not with human government, but with ungodly spiritual forces that act as rulers over the earth.
- **Col. 1:13-14.**¹⁰ Believers are rescued from the kingdom of darkness, and are now in the kingdom of Jesus.
- **Col. 1:16-17.** Jesus created all things, including government. And they exist for him. And he is over all things.
- **Col. 3:10-11.** Paul says that, for the believer, all national, racial, social and religious lines are eliminated. The new Christian identity is in Christ alone.
- **Col. 3:22-4:1.** See Ephesians 6:5-9.
- **Philemon 8-21.**¹¹ Paul writes to Philemon about his slave, Onesimus, who had apparently ran away from Philemon. Paul says that Onesimus is following Jesus. And Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon. Yet, Paul does not simply advocate Onesimus continuing as a slave as before. Rather, he challenges Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother, an equal. And Paul says that if Onesimus owes Philemon anything, to charge it to Paul. Without saying it explicitly in this instance, Paul is undermining the legal/economic/social structure of slavery through the new identity found in the gospel of Jesus.
- **Philippians 2:6-11.**¹² Paul gives the Jesus story in such a way that it makes Caesar’s story a parody.¹³
- **Philippians 3:20-21.** Paul gives Jesus the titles and authority Caesar would have claimed.¹⁴
- **Philippians 4:22.** Apparently there were believers who actually worked within Caesar’s household. Since Nero was the emperor at the time, this would have been a potentially dangerous job for a Christian.
- **1 Tim. 2:1-8.**¹⁵ Paul tells the Ephesian church, through Timothy, that they are to pray for governmental authority so they can live in peace, and spread the gospel. Don’t live in wrath

⁹ 59 AD

¹⁰ 60-61 AD

¹¹ 60-61 AD

¹² 61 AD

¹³ N. T. Wright, “Roman Empire,” *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

¹⁴ N. T. Wright, “Roman Empire,” *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

¹⁵ 61-64 AD

and dissension. Rather, pray that God will bring peace so they can be the church and spread the gospel without trouble.

- **1 Tim. 6:13.** Paul reminds Timothy that Jesus died at the hands of the Roman leadership.
- **Titus 2:9-10.**¹⁶ Like in Eph. 6:5-9 and Col. 3:22-4:1 Paul does not openly condemn the practice of slavery. However, he urges slaves to work from the heart, and do good, so that they will “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect” (Titus 2:10). Slaves are to take a radical approach to their position, for the sake of the gospel.
- **Titus 3:1-2.** Paul tells Titus to remind the churches in Crete to submit to their governmental authorities, to do good, to be peaceable, and to be considerate to all men.
- **1 Peter 2:9-25; 3:13-17; 4:1-5, 12-19; 5:6-10.**¹⁷ Peter says that believers are their own nation. They are exiles. Yet, at the same time, submit to the human government they find themselves under. Submit through doing what is right. Don’t do wrong and give the government reasons to punish you. Honor everyone, including the King. If you suffer for doing what is right, then so be it. This is said by the same guy who told the Jewish Council that he must obey God rather than men. The purpose of their doing good and enduring suffering for doing good is that the gospel would be made known.
- *Galba - Roman emperor (68-69 AD)*
- *Otho - Roman emperor (69 AD)*
- *Vitellus - Roman emperor (69 AD)*
- *Vespasian - Roman emperor (69-79 AD)*
- *Fall of Jerusalem (70 AD)*
- *Titus - Roman emperor (79-81 AD)*
- **Jude 8.**¹⁸ Jude critiques as ungodly those who reject authority.
- *Domitian - Roman emperor (81-96 AD)*
- **1 John 3:13.**¹⁹ It’s normal for the world to hate God’s people.
- **Revelation.**²⁰ The book of Revelation is “the most explicit early Christian critique of Roman imperial ideology and resistance to it.” The post-Enlightenment Western church has failed to see this and thus Revelation has been seen mostly as a puzzle about future events. “From the vision of worship going on in heaven (Rev. 4-5) to the final vision of the new Jerusalem, the true eternal city [over against Rome], the book constantly and kaleidoscopically insists that God the Creator and Jesus the Lamb are the true objects of worship. Whatever human empire may do, God’s people must stay faithful.”²¹

¹⁶ 61-64 AD

¹⁷ 64 AD

¹⁸ 65-80 AD

¹⁹ 90-95 AD

²⁰ 90-95 AD

²¹ N. T. Wright, “Roman Empire,” *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

Scripture Study Summary

- The Church & Government in general
 - Jesus is king over everything. 1 Cor. 15:24-28, 50; Rom. 15:12; Eph. 1:8-10, 19-23; Col. 1:16-17; Col. 3:10-11
 - God is in charge of human government; He works out his purposes through it, even when it seems to be working against His people. Acts 4:9, 28; 5:38-39; 9:15, 31; 13:27-30; 18:10; 20:22; 21:10-14; 23:11; 26:16; Rom. 13:1-7;
 - God is just and will judge unjust governments. 2 Thess. 1:3-12; Revelation
 - Paul makes it clear that the real struggle that believers face is not with human government, but with ungodly spiritual forces that act as rulers over the earth. Eph. 6:10-12; Col. 1:13-14
 - The church being who she is—in particular her proclamation of the gospel—seems to be governing principle of how she relates to human government. Acts 1:7-8; 5:42; 2 Cor. 10:3-6
 - At times the human government is the object of the proclamation of the gospel. Acts 13:4-12; 21:17-26:32
 - God gives specific instructions at specific times for how to deal with human government. Acts 21:10-14; 23:11; 27:23-25
 - At times the human government protects the church. Acts 19:23-20:1; 21:31-40; 22:22-29; 23:10-
 - The church should be able to govern its own affairs without resorting to the human government to handle matters of conflict. 1 Cor. 5:9-6:8
- The Church under oppositional government
 - Prayer & unity are the appropriate Church responses to governmental opposition. Acts 1:14; 4:23-37; 5:42; 12:5, 12-17
 - It is God who gives the Church the power to proclaim the gospel amidst opposition. Acts 1:8; 4:29-31, 33; 5:20-21; 6:15; 7:54-56, 60; 23:11;
 - God, as ruler over all governments, protects his people from adversarial human government. He does miracles to foil governmental opposition to His people and to the proclamation of the gospel. Acts 5:17-21; 9:15, 31; 12:1-19; 16:25-34; 18:9-17; 23:16-35; Acts 27:23-25; 2 Thess. 1:3-12
 - Persecution, in the form of false accusations and/or physical harm, seems to be a normative experience for the church. Acts 5:40-42; 6:8-14; 8:1-4; 9:16; 12:1-3; 13-14; 16:19-21; 17:6-8; 19:23-28; 21:27-32; 23:12-15; 24:1-9; 2 Cor. 11:22-33; 1 John 3:13
 - The early church counted it a privilege, a joy, to suffer because of their devotion to Jesus. Acts 5:40-41; 9:16; 13:51-52;
 - Persecution seems to be a catalyst for the growth of the church. Acts 8:1-5; 9:16; 11:19-21; 16:19-34
 - At times it is best simply to flee the oppositional human government. Acts 8:1; 9:25, 30; 13:50-51; 14:5-7; 17:10; 20:1
 - Often the church must simply endure faithfully under oppressive government. 2 Thess. 1:3-12; Revelation

- Christians can work in government, and even within government that persecutes the Church. Phil. 4:22
- Church submission to government
 - Obedience to the law of the human government is the Church's norm. It actually opens the door to the gospel, and keeps us from unnecessary suffering. It is not OK to suffer for doing evil. Instead do good. If we suffer for doing good, then so be it. Acts 4:21; 21:23-26; 24:12-13, 16; 25:8, 10-11; Rom. 12:17-18; 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-8; Titus 3:1-2; 1 Peter 2:9-25; 3:13-17; 4:1-5, 12-19; 5:6-10; Jude 8
 - The Church prays for a peaceful government so the Church can be the church and proclaim the gospel without unnecessary opposition. 1 Tim. 2:1-8
 - Paul actually leveraged the governmental system to protect himself and to further the reach of the gospel. Acts 16:37-39; 25:11-12, 21, 25; 26:32; 28:7-10, 19
- Church resistance to human government
 - Resistance to human government seems to be clearly related to preaching the gospel. The early church continued to preach the gospel even after being told not to do so. Acts 4:18-22, 29-31; 5:42
 - At times very direct speech about the wrongness of governmental action is appropriate. It seems to be that it is done when there is either an opportunity to articulate the gospel to the government, or a threat to its proclamation is being made. Acts 4:9; 5:28-30; 7:51-53
 - On rare occasion, disobedience to governmental authority is appropriate. It seems that the rubric has to do with when the governmental authority is legislating against the Church being the Church; in virtually every instance in the NT it is when the law prevents proclamation of the gospel. Acts 4:18-22, 29-31; 5:28-29, 40-42
 - The church implicitly and subversively opposes civil law which runs counter to biblical truth. This is done in a peaceful way, with the purpose of seeing kingdom values expressed in the culture. 1 Cor. 7:21-24; Romans 1:1-5, 16-17; 15:12; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1; Philemon 8-21; Phil. 2:6-11; 3:20-21; Titus 2:9-10;

Secondary sources

Wright, N. T. "Roman Empire." *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. Pages 695-696.

- Rome started as a republic but eventually became an empire governed by an emperor. This transition happened through the son of Julius Caesar, Octavius, who named himself "Augustus." His crowning as the emperor was called "good news" (same term for "gospel"). Throughout the Roman empire a cult of emperor worship arose. Those who built and maintained temples to Augustus were given tax-exempt status. Nero made the recognition of his divinity mandatory.²²
- The Jewish people had long history of living under foreign rule and learning to be God's people. In Babylonian exile God instructed them to bless the land of their exile and seek its

²² N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 695.

welfare (Jer. 29:7). In Daniel we see repeated clashes between the pagan empire and God's people, but God's people continuing to serve the pagan empire in public, governmental roles. "In the political thought that follows from Jewish monotheism, the one God calls rulers to account but does not want the world to collapse into anarchy."²³ These two elements essentially create poles of a continuum along which Jewish society engaged pagan empires. It was into this environment that Jesus was born.²⁴

- Jesus' words in Mark 12:13-17 could be heard either as a call to revolt (similar to 1 Macc. 2:68), or a command to be a good citizen, or both.²⁵
- Jesus' clash with Rome reached its height in John 18:33-19:16). "Jesus acknowledges that Pilate's power over him comes from God, while continuing to challenge him with news about a kingdom from beyond the world (John 18:36).²⁶
- "Paul echoes the entire range of Roman imperial rhetoric in several passages:" Paul offers an "implicit critique of Caesar, his empire, and all that he stood for..."²⁷
 - Phil. 2:6-11 Paul gives the Jesus story in such a way that it makes Caesar's story a parody.
 - Phil. 3:20-21 Paul gives Jesus the titles and authority Caesar would have claimed.
 - 1 Thess. 4:15-17 Paul "draws a vivid picture of the reappearance of Jesus on the model of Caesar paying a state visit to a colony"
 - Rom. 1:3-5 Paul says that the "good news" is about Jesus who can demand loyalty from the whole world.
 - Rom. 1:16-17 Paul says that "salvation" is from God, it is God's justice revealed.
 - Rom. 15:12 Paul says that Jesus, the Messiah, will rule the nations.
- Rom. 13:1-7, Jer. 29, and 1 Pet. 2:13-17 are not instructions for "political quietism, but a warning against the wrong sort of resistance."²⁸
- The book of Revelation is "the most explicit early Christian critique of Roman imperial ideology and resistance to it." The post-Enlightenment Western church has failed to see this and thus Revelation has been a puzzle about future events. "From the vision of worship going on in heaven (Rev. 4-5) to the final vision of the new Jerusalem, the true eternal city [over against Rome], the book constantly and kaleidoscopically insists that God the Creator and

²³ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

²⁴ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

²⁵ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

²⁶ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

²⁷ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

²⁸ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

Jesus the Lamb are the true objects of worship. Whatever human empire may do, God's people must stay faithful."²⁹

- "The NT remains rooted in the Jewish critique of pagan empire, articulating that critique afresh in the light of Jesus and the Spirit in the new circumstances of worldwide Roman rule, and thereby providing a model for the church in our own day."³⁰

Mott, Stephen. *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

- Examples of resistance to government:
 - Midwives (Ex. 1:15-22), Elijah, Moses, Jeremiah and Amos all resisted their political authorities where they were in conflict with God's will.³¹
 - The early church resisted the Roman Empire's law of emperor worship.³²

Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1*. HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

- "The Roman Empire had brought to the Mediterranean basin an unprecedented political unity. Although each region kept some of its ancient laws and customs, the general policy of the empire was to encourage as much uniformity as possible without doing unnecessary violence to the uses of each area. In this they followed the example of Alexander. Both Alexander and the Roman Empire succeeded to a remarkable degree, and therefore Roman law and Hellenistic culture comprised the context in which the early church took shape. The political unity wrought by the Roman Empire allowed the early Christians to travel without having to fear bandits or local wars. When reading about Paul's journeys, we see that the great threat to shipping at that time was bad weather. A few decades earlier, an encounter with pirates was much more to be feared than any storm. In the first century, well-paved and well-guarded roads ran to the most distant provinces— even though most trade and travel took place by water. Since trade flourished, travel was constant; thus Christianity often reached a new region, not through the work of missionaries or preachers, but rather through traveling traders, slaves, and others. In that sense, the political circumstances favored the spread of Christianity... But other aspects of those circumstances were a threat and a challenge to the early Christians. In order to achieve greater unity, imperial policy sought religious uniformity by following two routes: syncretism (the indiscriminate mixing of elements from various religions) and emperor worship. Rome had a vested interest in having its subjects from different lands believe that, although their gods had different names, they were ultimately the same gods. To the Roman Pantheon (temple of all gods) were added numerous gods from different lands. The same roads

²⁹ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

³⁰ N. T. Wright, "Roman Empire," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 696.

³¹ Stephen Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 152-153.

³² Stephen Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 152-153.

and sea lanes that served Christian missionary expansion were also traveled by people of all sorts of traditions and beliefs. These traditions and beliefs mingled in the plazas and markets of the cities, to the point that their original form was barely recognizable. Syncretism became the fashion of the time. In that atmosphere, Jews and Christians were seen as unbending fanatics who insisted on the sole worship of their One God— an alien cyst that must be removed for the good of society. But it was another element in Roman religion that eventually became the reason for persecution. This was the worship of the ruling emperor. Roman authorities saw this as a means of unity and a test of loyalty. To refuse to burn incense before the emperor’s image was a sign of treason or at the very least of disloyalty. When Christians refused to burn incense before the emperor’s image, they did so as a witness to their faith; but the authorities condemned them as disloyal and seditious people.”³³

- Neither Christians nor Jews originally considered Christianity an original religion or an alternative to Judaism. Christians saw it as true Judaism, what it was meant to be, and Jews saw it as a Jewish heresy. Thus, during the earliest days of Christianity’s existence, persecution came from the Jews, and protection from the Jews actually came from Rome. See the examples in Acts 18:14-15. Rome intervened only when a riot or disorderly conduct ensued. Otherwise, they preferred to stay out of the religious quarrel. Eventually, Jews were expelled from Rome in 51 AD because of riots that, it appears, were based on the conflict between Jewish Christians and Jews.³⁴
- Jews were generally not persecuted for refusing to worship the emperor. Rome understood that, for the Jews, it was a matter of religious conviction. However, as Christianity surfaced as a religion distinct from Judaism, the same tolerance was not extended to Christianity, perhaps primarily because it was gaining so many non-Jewish adherents.³⁵
- Nero blamed Christians for the fire of 64 AD in Rome. It was simply to allay suspicions that he had himself started the fire. Christians were reputed to be “haters of mankind,” likely because of their abstention from public amusements such as theater, etc. because of its heavily pagan influence. Also, Christians supposedly practiced “abominations” which were not clearly defined, but rumored. Thus, Christians were persecuted fiercely by Nero until 69 AD when he killed himself. For a short time after Nero, Christians were generally ignored, though the laws against them passed by Nero still remained (which are no longer extant).³⁶
- Domitian resumed persecution against Christians, primarily as part of his anti-Jewish policy. There was, again, not a clear distinction in the Roman mind between Christians and Jews. Domitian sought to reaffirm and enliven Roman tradition, including its gods. He demanded that the Jewish temple contributions, which no longer supported the temple since it had been razed in 70 AD, be given to Rome. Some Jews resisted. Others gave it while voicing their

³³ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 482-521). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

³⁴ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 779-797). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

³⁵ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Location 797). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

³⁶ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 827-876). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

dissent. Thus, Domitian persecuted Jews and Christians alike. Once his reign ended, Christians experienced a period of relative peace.³⁷

- In the first and second centuries, and running into the third, the general policy of Rome toward Christians was not to seek them out and punish. Rather, if they were brought before the Roman courts, were accused of being Christian, and then refused to recant (i.e. worship Roman gods by burning incense) then they were punished. The essential concern seemed to be contempt for Roman courts. The Christians weren't considered to be committing crimes by being Christian, but were committing crimes by refusing to submit to the Roman gods, which essentially meant disloyalty to the state.³⁸
- Christians and Jews in the Roman empire were frequently called “atheists” because they believed in an invisible God.³⁹
- Persecution of Christians increased under Marcus Aurelius, who acceded to the throne in 161 AD. In general, Christians were persecuted for their obstinacy; for their refusal to recant their faith and defer to the Roman gods. Once Aurelius died, persecution slowed until the end of the 2nd century.⁴⁰
- “...it is important to note that, in contrast with much of what we have often been told, it was not usually the worst emperors, and sometimes some of the best, who persecuted Christians. This will become more apparent as the third century advances, and belies the notion that persecution was usually due either to corrupt authorities or to evil and inept rulers. For a number of reasons, some of them justified, the authorities saw in Christianity a movement with subversive overtones, and therefore sought to suppress it, not because they were corrupt or ill-informed, but rather as a matter of policy in defense of the integrity of the state.”⁴¹
- At the beginning of the 3rd century, persecution against Christians erupted under Septimius Severus. Division within Rome and many enemies without caused him to try and unite the empire through religious harmony: “thus settled on a policy of promoting syncretism. He proposed a plan to bring all his subjects together under the worship of Sol invictus (the “Unconquered Sun”)— and to subsume under that worship all the various religions and philosophies then current. All gods were to be accepted, as long as one acknowledged the Sun that reigned above all. This policy soon clashed with what seemed the obstinacy of two groups that refused to yield to syncretism: Jews and Christians. Septimius Severus then decided to stop the spread of those two religions, and thus outlawed, under penalty of death, all conversions to

³⁷ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 877-902). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

³⁸ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 925-969). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

³⁹ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 902, 1037). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

⁴⁰ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 1037-1092). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

⁴¹ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 1120-1124). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

Christianity or to Judaism— for at that point both religions were gaining numerous converts. This was in addition to the still existing threat of Trajan’s legislation.”⁴²

- Septimius Severus’ persecution lasted for 10 or so years. Then the persecution abated for almost 50 years. The imperial policies didn’t change, but the persecution ceased. “In short, during almost half a century, persecution was rare, while the number of converts to Christianity was great. For this entire generation of Christians, the martyrs were worthy of great admiration, but they had lived in times past, and those evil times were not likely to be repeated. Every day there were more Christians among the aristocracy, and the ancient rumors about Christian immorality had little credence among the masses. Persecution was a distant memory, both painful and glorious.”⁴³
- In 249, Decius initiated a new persecution of Christians. Rome was in economic crisis, its borders were challenged, and it was disunited. So Decius sought to reinstitute the Roman gods as the unifying factor. He required all people to sacrifice to Decius. They had to produce a certificate which showed that they had. Not to have the certificate was rebellion to the state. And Decius didn’t simply martyr those who refused to sacrifice to the state; he tortured them over long periods of time so they would apostatize. This persecution was short (2 years), but very difficult. The church was not ready for it. She had enjoyed almost 50 years of relative peace.⁴⁴
- “Furthermore, while the great apologists [during the second and third centuries] made every effort to prove to the authorities that their faith was not opposed to imperial policies, there are indications that some common Christians were well aware that there was an unavoidable clash between the goals of the empire and the divine purpose. When one of these Christians was taken before imperial authorities, we are told that he refused to acknowledge the authority of the emperor, and declared that Christ was ‘my Lord, the emperor over all kings and all nations.’ Finally, while some of the more cultured Christians tended to spiritualize Christian hope, in the faith of the common people there was still the vision of a Kingdom that would supplant the present order, of a new Jerusalem where God would wipe away the tears of those who were suffering under the social order of the empire.”⁴⁵
- The church enjoyed a long period of relative peace from early third century (around 215 AD) until the beginning of the fourth century. Under a failed team of Roman emperors, the church endured for a decade the worst persecution it ever suffered. Houses of worship were burned, and Bibles were confiscated. Many Christians were imprisoned, tortured, and martyred. The reason for the persecution was, first, the fact that many Christians would either not serve in the army, or had become believers while in the army. Christians in the military were dismissed for

⁴² Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 1903-1909). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

⁴³ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 1946-1949). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

⁴⁴ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 1929-1975). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

⁴⁵ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 2077-2082). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

fear of disloyalty. The empire was so unstable that any hint of disunity was crushed. Then Christians were removed from all places of influence. Eventually the emperor who rose to the top, Galerius, became seriously ill and, in 311 AD, offered leniency to Christians while ordering them to pray for him. This ended the persecution.⁴⁶

- Shortly after Galerius' illness, Constantine marched on Rome and eventually issued the Edict of Milan in 313 AD which officially ended the persecution of Christians. When marching on Rome, Constantine had a vision to put a symbol on the shields of his soldiers. The symbol appeared to be the first two letters in "Christ." Some say this is when Constantine converted to Christianity. Other historians say it is far less simple than that, but was a process.⁴⁷ "Whether this was in truth a victory, or the beginning of new and perhaps greater difficulties, will be the theme of many of the chapters to follow. Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt that the conversion of Constantine had enormous consequences for Christianity, which was forced to face new questions. What would happen when those who called themselves servants of a carpenter, and whose great heroes were fisherfolk, slaves, and criminals condemned to death by the state, suddenly saw themselves surrounded by imperial pomp and power? Would they remain firm in their faith? Or would it be that those who had stood firm before tortures and before beasts would give way to the temptations of an easy life and of social prestige? These were the burning issues that the Christian church had to face in the next period of its history."⁴⁸
- "The question of the nature and sincerity of his [Constantine's] conversion must also be discussed. But what is of paramount importance for the story of Christianity is not so much how sincere Constantine was, or how he understood the Christian faith, as the impact of his conversion and his rule both during his lifetime and thereafter. That impact was such that it has even been suggested that throughout most of its history the church has lived in its Constantinian era, and that even now, in the twenty-first century, we are going through crises connected with the end of that long era. Whether or not this is true is a question to be discussed when our narrative comes to the present day. In any case, Constantine's religious policies had such enormous effect on the course of Christianity that all of Part II may be seen as a series of reactions and adjustments in response to those policies."⁴⁹
- Constantine seemed to have a genuine respect for, and experience with, Christianity. But he also participated in pagan practices and even accepted the title of a pagan deity—as emperor, the high priest of the pagan gods. Constantine ended Christian persecution and supported Christians, yet at the same time supported paganism that was firmly entrenched in much of the Roman empire. Constantine never submitted himself to baptism or Christian teaching, though he was baptized on his deathbed. Overall, it appears that he had a rudimentary knowledge of

⁴⁶ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 2286-2364). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

⁴⁷ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 2360-2396). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

⁴⁸ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 2405-2410). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

⁴⁹ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 2452-2458). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

and respect for Christianity, perhaps even in a superstitious way, but saw no conflict between maintaining faith in both Christianity and pagan religions. Constantine never did make Christianity the official religion of Rome. It wasn't until the end of the fourth century, in 392, when pagan worship was outlawed.⁵⁰

- There were significant impacts on the Church from Constantine's change: Persecution ceased. "But the immediate impact of that conversion on the life of the church went far beyond the obvious cessation of persecution. In this regard, a series of imperial edicts granted the church and its leaders' privileges whose echoes may still be seen in some areas in the twenty-first century. One of this was tax exemption for church properties, as well as making it legal to bequeath property to the church. Over the long run, this would mean that the church would come to own vast lands and other riches. The bishops— at the time there were about eighteen hundred of them— as well as other clergy were also granted exemption from taxes, from military conscription, and from the days of labor that others were forced to devote to public works. First on the occasion of the Synod of Arles in 314, then of the Council of Nicaea in 325, and eventually as a matter of normal policy, bishops were granted free access to the imperial posts. Constantine also sought to legislate on matters of personal conduct— particularly sexual morality— in ways that seem to have been influenced by Christian teaching. But in this regard his efforts had as scant results as many other similar efforts throughout the history of the church. At the same time, the new privileges, prestige and power now granted to church leaders soon led to acts of arrogance and even to corruption... As for the laity, there is no doubt that the experience of conversion became less dramatic or fateful than it had been in earlier times. There is ample evidence of increasing syncretism and superstition. Archeologists have found proof of this in tombs in various areas of the empire, where people were buried with a combination of Christian and pagan symbols and religious artifacts. When people became ill, they often had recourse to ancient magical practice, much to the chagrin of many a Christian preacher. Gladiatorial combats persisted, and some Christians now attended— as they also attended plays that had earlier been forbidden to them... people were flocking into the church in such numbers that there was little time to prepare them for baptism, and even less to guide them in the Christian life once they had been baptized. In contrast to earlier times, when there was a far-reaching program of teaching and training for new converts, the church now found itself overwhelmed by the numbers of those requesting baptism, and unable to give them proper training and supervision. The long term of training and teaching before receiving baptism was dramatically shortened, and soon many went to the baptismal font with very little idea of its significance. Many of these new converts brought with them beliefs and customs that the earlier church would have considered unacceptable— to which numerous sermons attacking superstition among believers give ample witness... One of the results of the new situation was the development of what may be called an 'official theology.' Overwhelmed by the favor that the emperor was pouring on them, many Christians sought to show that Constantine was chosen by God to bring the history of both church and empire to its culmination, where both were joined. Typical of this attitude was church historian Eusebius of

⁵⁰ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 2554-2638). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

Caesarea. Others took the opposite tack. For them, the fact that the emperors now declared themselves Christian, and that for this reason people were flocking to the church, was not a blessing, but rather a significant loss. Some who tended to look at matters under this light, but did not wish to break communion with the rest of the church, withdrew to the desert, there to lead a life of meditation and asceticism... Most Christians, however, reacted to the new situation with neither total acceptance nor total rejection. Most church leaders saw the new circumstances as offering unexpected opportunities, but also great dangers. Thus, while affirming their loyalty to the emperor, as most Christians had always done, they insisted that their ultimate loyalty belonged only to God. Such was the attitude of the great fathers of the church— a misnomer, for there were also mothers among them. Since both danger and opportunity were great, these leaders faced a difficult task. Perhaps not all of their decisions and attitudes were wise; but even so, this was an age of giants who would shape the church and its theology for centuries to come.”⁵¹

⁵¹ Gonzalez, Justo L. (2014-11-25). *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1* (Kindle Locations 2677-2803). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.