

Gospel Influence

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1. What is the gospel?
2. Should the gospel influence all people's lives?
3. If all, to what extent?
4. What areas of life shouldn't be influenced by the gospel?

Historian Alvin Schmidt (*How Christianity Changed the World*; 2004) points out how the spread of Christianity and Christian influence on government was primarily responsible for outlawing infanticide, child abandonment, and abortion in the Roman Empire (in AD 374); outlawing the brutal battles-to-the-death in which thousands of gladiators had died (in AD 404); outlawing the cruel punishment of branding the faces of criminals (in AD 315); instituting prison reforms such as the segregating of male and female prisoners (by AD 361); stopping the practice of human sacrifice among the Irish, the Prussians, and the Lithuanians as well as among other nations;⁶⁴

outlawing pedophilia; granting of property rights and other protections to women;⁶⁶ banning polygamy (which is still practiced in some Muslim nations today); prohibiting the burning alive of widows in India (in 1829); outlawing the painful and crippling practice of binding young women's feet in China (in 1912); persuading government officials to begin a system of public schools in Germany (in the sixteenth century); and advancing the idea of compulsory education of all children in a number of European countries.⁷¹ *(Ibid., 179–80. Although this is not a matter of merely influencing laws, Schmidt also points out the immense influence of Christians on higher education:*

By the year 1932 there were 182 colleges and universities in the United States, and of that number, 92 percent had been founded by Christian denominations (p. 190).

During the history of the church, Christians have had a decisive influence in opposing and often abolishing slavery in the Roman Empire, in Ireland, and in most of Europe (though Schmidt frankly notes that a minority of “erring” Christian teachers have supported slavery in various centuries). In England, William Wilberforce, a devout Christian, led the successful effort to abolish the slave trade and then slavery itself throughout the British Empire by 1840.

In the United States, though there were vocal defenders of slavery among Christians in the South, they were vastly outnumbered by the many Christians who were ardent abolitionists, speaking, writing, and agitating constantly for the abolition of slavery in the United States. Schmidt notes that two-thirds of the American abolitionists in the mid-1830s were Christian clergymen, and he gives numerous examples of the strong Christian commitment of several of the most influential of the antislavery crusaders, including Elijah Lovejoy (the first abolitionist martyr), Lyman Beecher, Edward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe (author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), Charles Finney, Charles T. Torrey, Theodore Weld,

William Lloyd Garrison, “and others too numerous to mention.” The American civil rights movement that resulted in the outlawing of racial segregation and discrimination was led by Martin Luther King Jr., a Christian pastor, and supported by many Christian churches and groups.⁷⁶

There was also strong influence from Christian ideas and influential Christians in the formulation of the Magna Carta in England (1215) and of the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Constitution (1787) in the United States.

These are three of the most significant documents in the history of governments on the earth, and all three show the marks of significant Christian influence in the foundational ideas of how governments should function. These foundations for British and American government did not come about as a result of the “do evangelism, not politics” view.

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1. Does the Bible (N/T) specifically teach on civil government?

1. Romans 13:1-6

2. 1 Peter 2:13-14, 17

3. 1 Timothy 2:1-8

2. Social/Political/Christian Issues:

1. Sanctity of human life

2. Sanctity of marriage/family

3. Religious freedom