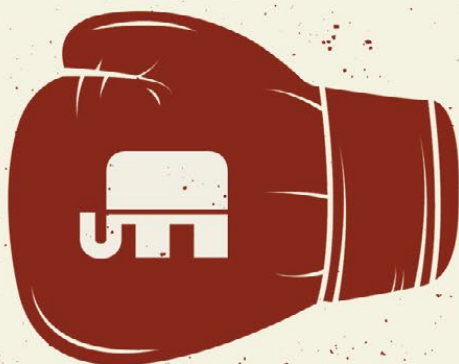


**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**JONATHAN  
LEEMAN**



**HOW THE  
NATIONS  
— RAGE —**

Rethinking Faith and Politics in

**A DIVIDED AGE**

# CHAPTER 1

## A NATION RAGING, A CHURCH UNCHANGING

1. One of the main goals of this book is to help us rethink the relationship between politics and religion, like the subtitle says. Before we “rethink,” let’s first ask what we think. How would you describe the relationship between religion and politics?

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2. Jesus says to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21). What does that mean?

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**3.** As you think about the way Christians engage politically in your nation, what is something they do well? Do poorly?

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**4.** One of this book's goals is to argue that we should invest our political hopes first and foremost in our local churches. That doesn't mean partisan hopes. Nor does it mean hopes about the next elections. What does it mean? (Hint: remember what Leeman said about Lincoln's hope for a "just and lasting peace" first take root and growing in our churches.)

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**5.** Leeman says that Christians must be before we do. That means, we should live out in our life together as churches those values and rules of justice we hope will characterize the nation. So name one or two political issues that animate people today, and then discuss what "living out" that issue in your own life might look like in the context of your church.

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**6.** Does your nation “rage against the Lord and his Anointed”? (Hint: the answer is “yes”.) How then do you become a better patriot by identifying less with your nation and identifying with Jesus more?

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**7.** Leeman says that, when it comes to political engagement, we should expect a battle. Our goal, then, is not to withdraw or dominate. It’s to represent; meaning, represent the righteousness and justice and love of our heavenly King. How might representing King Jesus cause our way of engaging a nation and its public square to look different than those who either withdraw or try to dominate?

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# — CHAPTER 2 —

## PUBLIC SQUARE: NOT NEUTRAL, BUT A BATTLEGROUND OF GODS

1. Explain how all people, whether they believe in God or not, are fundamentally religious.

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2. Explain how our politics serve our worship, and how governments serve gods.

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**3.** Someone says to you, “We should not legislate morality.” What’s non-sensical about this claim? How would you respond?

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**4.** People often claim that the public square should be “neutral” between various religions, while Leeman claims that the public square is nothing more or less than a battleground of gods. Explain why maintaining the pretense the public square is religiously neutral puts people who believe in a big-G God at a comparative disadvantage to people who believe only in little-g gods or idols?

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**5.** This author maintains that we cannot separate religion and politics, but that we must separate church and state. Explain.

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**6.** What's the paradox of religious liberty, according to Leeman?

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**7.** What is the reigning “religion” of the West? What false gods tempt you?

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# CHAPTER 3

## HEART: NOT SELF-EXALTING, BUT BORN-AGAIN AND JUSTIFIED

1. Leeman mentioned the line from the novel *All the Light We Cannot See*: “We are Malouins first . . . Bretons next. French if there’s anything left over.” Their first loyalty was to their city (Saint-Malo), then their ethnicity (Breton), and last their nation (France). How would you rank your first three or four group loyalties (think nation, ethnicity, family, region, team, vocation, political party, gender, etc.)? One way to answer that question is, which groups will most likely provoke your sense of rivalry with other groups.

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**2.** If we're going to think about a Christian view of politics, why must we begin with the heart?

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**3.** Explain how racism, sexism, slavery, and every form of political oppression begins with self-justification. By the same token, explain how the innate fallen desire for self-rule which characterizes all of us begins with self-justification.

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**4.** Following this last question, Leeman argues that the justification by faith alone brings an end to political oppression and war for those with new hearts. When we stop trying to prove ourselves with something we are, and accept the fact that we can be righteous only by a gift of God's grace, we will stop putting ourselves above others, or dominate others. If you think back to your answers to question 1, how should the doctrine of justification by faith alone impact your sense of group identity and political rivalry for those who don't belong to your group?

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**5.** What are the four ingredients of a truly righteous society according to Jeremiah 31, and where should we see such societies first show up on planet Earth?

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**6.** If the life of a church never provokes the praise of non-Christian neighbors, it's probably doing something wrong. And if it never provokes their opposition, it's probably doing something wrong. Explain.

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**7.** A new covenant or Christian politics begins with a born-again heart. Nonetheless, governments have been given the sword because people are not born again (and Christians don't always act like it either!). How should a Christian's work in the public square, which calls for the use of coercive force, be different than a non-Christian's? For instance, what would it look like for a Christian both work as a police officer and to live out the Beatitudes?

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# CHAPTER 4

## BIBLE: NOT CASE LAW, BUT A CONSTITUTION

1. What are some common conceptions people have about how the Bible relates to politics? How can Christian disagreements about the role of the Bible and politics threaten unity in the church?

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2. Explain what Leeman means when he says the Bible is more like a constitution and less like case law.

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**3.** Read Revelation 6:15-17 and then answer this: True or false—the Bible is the book by which all political activity, whether of Christians or non-Christians, will be judged. Explain your answer.

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**4.** What is the difference between a law that criminalizes something and a marriage law? What does this difference make as Christians compare laws that criminalize certain sins (say, adultery) and laws supporting same-sex marriage?

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**5.** Why is it crucial for Christians to recognize the distinction between law and wisdom when it comes to politics?

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**6.** What does Leeman mean by a “straight-line issue” versus “a jagged line issue”? Name a few examples of each? Why is this distinction helpful for both affirming Christian liberty and maintaining church unity?

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**7.** When it comes to reading the Bible politically, Leeman says it’s crucial to begin by asking which covenantal audience the biblical author has in mind. Why is this the case?

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# CHAPTER 5

## GOVERNMENT: NOT A SAVIOR, BUT A PLATFORM BUILDER

1. Christians sometimes say that government or politics doesn't matter. Why is this short-sighted and mistaken?

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2. What are the two kinds of governments in the Bible? What distinguishes them?

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**3.** The Declaration of Independence says governing authority comes “from the consent of the governed.” It’s true that God employs human actions to put a government in place, and that in a democratic nation, the government rules by the people’s consent. Yet Romans 13 teaches that every government, democratic or non-democratic, possesses its authority from God. How do we put this together? Why, most fundamentally, do we obey government?

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**4.** What are the two purposes of government we can draw out of Genesis 9:1-7? What’s the third purpose of government that we can discern from the fact that Genesis 9 comes before God’s call to Abraham in Genesis 12—a purpose we also see in Acts 17:36-37 and 1 Timothy 2:1-4?

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**5.** Explain how Genesis 9:5-6 provides us with a doctrine of religious tolerance based on what it does not say.

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**6.** What is the best form of government in the Bible? To get at the same question another way, what should be your goal in all of your political engagement?

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**7.** What responsibility do you personally have to work for good government?

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# CHAPTER 6

## CHURCH: NOT LOBBYING ORGANIZATIONS, BUT EMBASSIES OF HEAVEN

1. Often we let political parties set our political agendas. But this chapter argues that the gospel and our churches should. That doesn't necessarily mean churches tell us how to vote. It means our churches are where we first live out the justice and righteousness of God. If all of that is true, how involved should you be with your church? What role does your church membership play?

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- 2.** Pick a couple areas of public policy—maybe tax, welfare, and immigration. Illustrate how our live and fellowship inside a church should demonstrate the love and righteousness of God in those areas.

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- 3.** Explain how churches both are and are not a political threat to the nations? Why is persecution rational from the perspective of the nations?

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**4.** What do the keys of the kingdom give a church the authority to do? Explain how the authority of the keys gives a church and embassy-like authority and sign-maker? With these things in mind, how is understanding the authority of the church crucial to understanding the separation of church and state?

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**5.** This chapter offered an illustration of a man who was removed from membership in a church for refusing to repent of sexual sin, while a pregnant single mom was embraced because she confessed her actions as sin and took steps of repentance. How do these two different responses to the same sin impact the church's political and evangelistic witness to the world?

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**6.** Why should pastors endorse candidates and make policy or constitutional recommendations only very reluctantly? Along these same lines, how is Christian liberty crucial to church unity?

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**7.** What are some practical steps you can take to better love people from different ethnicities and nationalities? What steps can you take to help your church grow in its multi-ethnic and multi-national witness?

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# CHAPTER 7

## CHRISTIANS: NOT CULTURE WARRIORS, BUT AMBASSADORS

1. The chapter begins with three wrong approaches to political engagement: disengagement, capitulation, and worldly engagement. Explain each. Which error are you most likely to fall into?

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2. Why is the idea of being a culture warrior tempting for Christians? Why is “ambassador” a better picture for what Scripture calls us to be?

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**3.** Politics is “Sisyphean,” but that should keep us from engagement. Why not? How should Christians measure political success?

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**4.** What political stewardships or opportunities to you have? How can you make good use of them?

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**5.** This chapter encourages Christians to be “principled pragmatists” in regard to the public square. What does that mean?

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**6.** Can you think of a situation in which you might ever take the “Polycarp approach”?

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**7.** Why is it crucial for Christians to keep a loose grip on their political party membership? What’s the danger if we don’t?

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# CHAPTER 8

## JUSTICE: NOT JUST RIGHTS, BUT RIGHT

1. How do most people today define justice?

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2. How does our God or gods impact our view of justice? Our views of rights, equality, and freedom?

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**3.** Explain why a Christian view of justice cannot begin with rights, but must begin with what God says is right? Does that mean a Christian should not care about rights?

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**4.** What is justice in the bible?

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**5.** If justice involves both lifting up the oppressed and punishing the oppressor, which are you more likely to neglect in your thinking about justice and in your life? Why? What steps can you take to address this?

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**6.** Thinking through the 12 lessons on doing justice, what are places in life you're most likely to neglect the biblical call to do justice?

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**7.** How can churches work together, both inside and outside, to model the justice of God?

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