



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on January 15, 2015

Pastor Educates Lawmakers on Biblical Duty to Resist Tyranny

In a revival of a centuries-old American tradition this month, a Wisconsin pastor offered a powerful election sermon to Montana lawmakers at the legislature urging them to do their biblical duty by standing up to escalating federal tyranny. Citing a broad array of Scriptures from the Bible and what is known as the “doctrine of the lesser magistrate,” Pastor Matt Trewhella told state legislators that they have more than just the right to protect citizens from growing lawlessness, tyranny, and wickedness in government — they have a moral and Christian obligation to do so. Increasing defiance of God’s law “is why you are watching Western Civilization crumble before your eyes,” he added.



The [historic sermon](#) at the state Capitol in Helena outlining the duties of lesser officials in the face of tyranny — to interpose between the intended victims, in this case, citizens, and the would-be oppressors — has already sparked headlines across America and [even abroad](#). Pastor Trewhella told *The New American* that his sermon to Montana lawmakers on January 4 was “perhaps the most important sermon” he ever gave. “The Bible speaks to all matters of life, including matters of civil government, so to speak to the civil authorities themselves from the Word of God was an honor,” he added.

In the sermon, the pastor argued that government totalitarianism has already come to America. “In the course of human history, the abuse of authority by men through the arm of the State is not an uncommon occurrence,” declared Trewhella, who serves as pastor at Mercy Seat Christian Church in Milwaukee and founded the pro-life group Missionaries to the Preborn. “From time to time in the history of men tyranny reaches a point where it demands a response. We live in such a time in our day. Good men, who recognize the threat, want to be assured, however, that their response to tyranny is proper, that it is legitimate, and that it is sound and just.”

With that, the pastor, who wrote a book on the subject titled [The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates](#), introduced the doctrine, which addresses “the duty of lower magistrates in the face of tyranny,” he said. The notion that lesser magistrates must defy anti-God ruling authorities was first articulated in its present form by John Calvin, who wrote that there are “popular magistrates” who have “been appointed to curb the tyranny of kings.” Even before that, the pastor explained, Western civilization had a firm grasp of the concept, as evidenced by John of Salisbury’s 1159 work *Policraticus*, for example, among other works and writings.

However, as Trewhella pointed out in his sermon, there are also numerous examples of the doctrine at work throughout the Bible. In his sermon to lawmakers, the pastor cited, among other cases



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documented in the Scriptures, the midwives in the Book of Exodus who defied pharaoh's orders to murder all male Hebrew newborns. Israel's interposition on behalf of King Saul's son, Jonathan, who was set to be executed for violating a decree he was unaware of, was also discussed. Daniel, of course, who at the time was a top government official, publicly defied King Darius' decree against praying.

"Daniel took an open stand in defiance of this unjust law," Trehwella explained, citing Scripture to show that Daniel knew of the unjust decree yet openly violated it. "And your duty is no different in our day."

The Founding Fathers, too, spoke of interposition, the pastor explained to lawmakers, pointing to Thomas Jefferson's Virginia Resolution of 1798 defying the federal government. The document declared that "the states who are parties thereto [parties to the U.S. Constitution] have the right, and are in duty bound, to interpose for arresting the progress of evil." James Madison, too, was a supporter of interposition and state nullification of unconstitutional federal statutes, saying that whenever the federal government usurps undelegated powers, "its acts are unauthoritative, void, and of no force."

Federal tyranny in defiance of God, continued Pastor Trehwella, is already present in America. "It has been for decades and it is growing," he explained. "We have a federal government that is out of control and has long ago spurned its constitutional restraints." Among other examples, he noted that Washington, D.C., has "already attacked and abridged liberty." It is now in the process of "plundering the American people," he added. "They have assailed the Christian institutions and traditions of our people and seem to be at war with much of the American people."

Other outrages in America imposed by an unconstrained federal government include the "cold-blooded murder of the unborn, the imposition of homosexual marriage upon our states, no-fault divorce, the decriminalization of adultery, the phalanx of laws created by the State to invade our domestic affairs, disarm the people, seize our property, and harass our persons." All of it, he said, points to "the growing tyranny in America." And it must be resisted if God's just judgment is to be abated and liberty preserved, he said.

"Listen to me now — and this is important — by your act of interposition, when you as lower magistrates defy the higher authority, you remind the federal authorities that their authority has limits," he explained to the assembled state lawmakers. "They are not to be blithely obeyed.... You need to understand — you possess authority. You need to understand the authority you possess is delegated authority. Your authority as a legislator was delegated to you of God. Romans 13 plainly declares you to be the servants or ministers of God."

As God's ministers, Trehwella continued, "you are to govern according to His rule." That means, among other points, that officials must reward those who do good, and punish those who do evil. "You are not to make law or policy which contradicts His moral law or His Word," he said. "And, if the higher authority makes unjust or immoral law you have a duty not to sustain his rebellion against God by obeying the unjust law. Rather, you have the duty to use your authority to resist his unjust or immoral law, and thus remind the higher authority in all their arrogance that their authority has limits."

God is the ultimate authority, the pastor noted. "Men need to understand that the State is not God," he continued. "They do not get to rule by mere fiat. They do not get to just make up law as they go.... The State's authority is not autonomous, nor unlimited. Rulers are not to contravene — violate, oppose, or contradict — God's law. Citizens are not bound to hold unlimited obedience to the civil government. Nor are lower magistrates to give unlimited obedience to the higher authorities."

In practice, Trehwella said, the doctrine of the lesser magistrates means that the primary duty of those



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lesser magistrates is threefold. “First, they are to oppose and resist any laws or edicts from the higher authority that contravene the law or Word of God,” he said. “Second, they are to protect the person, liberty, and property of those who reside within their jurisdiction from any unjust or immoral laws or actions by the higher authority. Third, they are not to implement any laws or decrees made by the higher authority that violate the Constitution, and if necessary, resist them.”

Especially important, Trewhella concluded, is to stop pretending that federal courts possess unlimited authority to trample on the U.S. Constitution and even God’s law itself. He cited the purported re- definition of marriage to include homosexual relationships on states by federal judges, as well as the purported legalization of abortion by the Supreme Court, as two of the most egregious examples that require interposition by lesser magistrates. ObamaCare, too, should be resisted, he said.

Speaking to *The New American*, Trewhella said he was trying to tell lawmakers “what they needed to hear at this dire time in our nation’s history, rather than flatter them.” Election sermons “have a rich history in our nation,” he continued, saying they were regularly preached from the mid-1600s until the mid-1800s. And they are important. “The church pulpits were the historical means whereby the people were instructed, from a theological foundation, in the purpose, functions, and limits of the State,” he said.

“If a citizenry does not know the purpose and limitations of the State, then the civil government can misuse its power because the citizenry is unable to measure when something improper is occurring,” Trewhella told *The New American*. “For there to be any indignation towards acts of tyranny by the State, one must be able to recognize that tyranny is taking place. The result of election sermons ceasing in our nation is that we now have a federal government that is bent on imposing more socialism, bigger government, and further decadence and immorality. Therefore, the interposition of the lesser magistrates is needed and election sermons need to be revived.”

There is also what Trewhella described as a “huge” role for citizens to play in the fight. “They must prod their state, county, and local authorities to stand in defiance of federal tyranny, and then they must have their back when they do stand — offering their substance and very bodies for all that is needed both publicly and privately in support of them,” he concluded.

Photo: Montana State Capitol

To order Pastor Matt Trewhella’s book *The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates*, [click here](#).

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