



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Christians and the Right to Vote – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. Owen Strachan

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. You probably have noticed from the headlines and trending topics on social media that we are definitely in election season. So it truly is important to think about what's at stake for our country from a biblical perspective. Consider the issues that affect your children, your neighbors, and our freedoms. Now is the time to make your voice heard with your vote.

On today's edition of Family Talk, Gary Bauer, our senior vice president of public policy at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute will be talking with Dr. Owen Strachan, the director of the new Dobson Culture Center. They'll be discussing Dr. Strachan's brand new e-book called *Voting and the Church*. They'll be diving into the fact that we as Christians need to vote, and also they'll look at some of the matters of concern taking a toll on this country. Here now is Gary Bauer to further introduce his guest, Dr. Owen Strachan, right here, right now on Family Talk.

Gary Bauer: Hello friends. Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Gary Bauer, the senior vice president of public policy here at the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm honored to serve along Dr. Dobson, who has been my friend for many years. I'm also the host of *Defending Faith, Family and Freedom*, the podcast here at JDFI.

We have a great guest today. We're going to have a great conversation. This is a conversation that is incredibly timely for this moment in America, and let me begin it by mentioning to you, you probably have noticed that if you open a newspaper or turn on the TV set, you are likely to see a poll done by somebody telling you what America thinks about all kinds of issues. And it's amazing. I remember, not that many years ago, there were two polls in America. One was the Gallup Poll and one was the Harris Poll. No relationship to the current Democrat candidate for president. And some people like one, some people like the other one, but today, there are hundreds of polls being done. You can see four or five of them every day. And for those of you that don't follow this kind of stuff, sometimes these polls might have 40 or 50 questions in them to try to

figure out exactly what the worldview is of the person that's being asked the questions.

But what if you don't have enough money to pay for a poll with 40 or 50 questions because the cost of the poll actually goes up the more questions you ask. Well, there's actually been research done about this. They found out that if you could only ask one question that would be the most likely to tell you what the individual you're talking to thinks about a whole lot of other things that you're not going to ask them about, that question would be did they regularly go to church and did they believe in God? If you answered yes to that, the pollster could conclude, now, it wasn't 100%, but statistically could conclude you would have certain views and certain expectations, even certain ideas about America all based on this one thing in your life. And likewise, if the pollster asks you the question and you respond, "Well, I don't go to church, I'm agnostic, or I'm an atheist," that would tell the pollster a whole lot of things about other things you might believe on the big issues of the day.

There are now voices on the side of those that believe in God is that are telling the church and their fellow Christians, "Well, that's great that you believe God is, but you need to stay out of the public square because that's just filled with traps and snares and you're going to irritate people and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Well, good grief.

Dr. Dobson has been saying for decades this is the very time followers of Jesus Christ need to be in the public square. Our guest today speaks about this issue more eloquently and with more intellectual firepower than, quite frankly, anybody I've run across. His name, you probably have heard of him is Dr. Owen Strachan. He is the senior director of the Dobson Culture Center at JDFI. If I read to you his whole biography, we'll be doing three or four shows here. This is an accomplished man. He ought to be around 80 years old, but he's a young man. He's multiple degrees. He's well known for being in the public debate, not only on social media, but on some of the major old media outlets that are still out there on TV and many other venues. And Owen is getting ready to come out with a great new book. So first of all, Owen, welcome to the show. Dr. Dobson and his wife, Shirley, send you their best and we're all pleased to have you on the team.

Dr. Owen Strachan: Thank you so much, Gary. It's an honor to be on the team to represent Dr. Dobson in some small way, and to engage with you. I'm so thankful for your model and example in the public square.

Gary Bauer: Thank you, Owen. Now, this is going to be an e-book and it probably will be available by time folks are listening in. What is the main point of this book and why did you choose to spend... I've written a couple of books. I don't care what their length is. It's like giving birth. This is like labor. It's a challenging process. Why did you decide to write it now with everything else that's going on in your life?

Dr. Owen Strachan: The desire was to galvanize the church, galvanize Christians to step up and understand that it is a great blessing of God to be able to participate in a political system and specifically have the ability to vote, to play a tiny little part in the process of democracy, in the process of choosing our leaders, choosing policies that our country should follow.

In recent years though, Gary, in particular, the younger tribe among evangelicals among Christians, has been hit very hard with an ideology that I call neither left nor right thinking. And what that ideology argues is that Christians are basically always above the fray. When it comes to politics, past generations got it wrong. They were in the muck. They got involved with candidates. They put out these horrible things called voter guides, and it freaked everybody out and basically ruined America and ruined Christian witness. And so nowadays, again, in particular, the younger generation, at least in some corners of the Christian world, is sold, "You should be third way. You should be neither left nor right." And there's a lot to say here, Gary, that we can unpack.

Of course, our witness is distinct. We aren't of Caesar. We aren't of any one party. We aren't of any one candidate. First and foremost, we're of Christ as Christians. So let that be said, but we've got to be very clear in 2024 and beyond, that the two parties, major parties in America before us are not the same. That there is one that is more or less supportive of the traditional, and to some degree, biblical worldview. And there is one that is basically trying to tear that to pieces. And so I'm trying to call people not to one partisan response per se that I line out in the book, but to say, Christians, search your Bible, put your boots on and let's get to work in the public square.

Gary Bauer: Well, Owen, what you're saying, of course, I love it. I've been frustrated, as I'm sure you have, to see the church of Jesus Christ at the time when America most desperately needs to hear our message running into the temptation of being AWOL, absent without leave from this big battle over what kind of country we are and what the right solutions are for our families and our future. I really want to stress this. I know you do too. You're not suggesting something that is unbiblical. You're not suggesting a degree of activity that's not rooted in the scripture. Matthew 5:13-16, isn't that where Christ talks about us being a salt and light?

Dr. Owen Strachan: Mm-hmm. It is, and that is so important because I think the way a lot of Christians have that concept packaged to them in churches across this land is basically, Gary, we should be nice. Unbelievers should like us. We, again, we shouldn't really get into the hot button issues that are going to cloud our witness. And so all we need to really do is just open up our arms, give people big hugs. And if the conversation turns to politics as believers, we just close our mouth, and occasionally, we let the phrase Jesus Christ come out of our lips. And that's all we do. That's it. That's being a Christian in 2024 with regard to politics.

And what I want to say is being salt and light definitely does mean loving unbelievers. It means loving your neighbor. We better do that. We want to be marked by that posture even when we engage in tough conversations over momentous issues. But being salt and light, salt is preservative and light makes the darkness go away. So apply that to citizenship and a civilization, and it means that you try to preserve, as a Christian, what is still there that is good, true and beautiful by God's common grace. You're trying to preserve. And then secondly, you're trying to promote. You're trying to promote what is good, true, and beautiful in the public square and not just say no to these bad things, but to say yes to the goodness of God and the design of God and the truth of God. And so I think Gary, our mandate, as Christians is honestly a lot bigger than the way a lot of Christians have heard it is.

Gary Bauer: Well, it's really a call to get our hands dirty. You can't just drive to church on a Sunday morning and ignore everything you see with your own eyes about what's happening in our country. Go in and hear a wonderful sermon and praise God, which of course, we do every Sunday, and then drive back home and park yourself in front of the TV set or whatever, and forget the fact that you're in a country that, I believe, was other than Israel, the first one built on the notion that our very liberty to worship, to teach our own children what we want to teach, that that doesn't come from Caesar. It doesn't come from our government. It comes from God. So how can we be neutral at a time when that very concept is now being debated and many people are rejecting the idea that God should have anything to do with the American government?

Dr. Owen Strachan: Yeah, you're exactly right. If we don't fight for religious liberty, which is the first of all, the liberties, the first of all the freedoms, the rest of the freedom is, over time, at least going to go away. A lot of Christians, though, I'm going to be honest here, we're tempted to take these freedoms and these blessings very much for granted. And it's the strangest phenomenon, Gary, because we're trying to graciously wake up fellow Christians to see this, but sometimes, it's almost like willful blindness.

So in this e-book that we're talking about, why Christians should engage in the public square, I want to be clear. I'm not coming at my fellow Christians and haranguing them. I'm trying though to say this is really serious. The days around us are evil. They really are trying to trans our kids. They really are trying to warp our judicial system. They want to pack courts. They want little boys to think they can become little girls. They want us to believe that homosexual marriage is the same as biblical marriage and on and on the list goes.

Gary Bauer: Yeah.

Dr. Owen Strachan: And we have to say both a yes to what is true, but also very much, Gary, we have to say a no to what is wrong.

Gary Bauer:

Well put, Owen. I've used the ingratitude argument sometimes, or tried to use it as a point. And it sort of begins with the idea, do any of us think that God was surprised when we were born in America? Of course, He wasn't surprised. He knew where we were going to be born. And if you just took an odds approach to all this, the odds would be, given the size of the world and how many countries in the world do not have religious liberty, or have governments that don't respond to the desires of the people, we could have been born in some really unpleasant places where being followers of Jesus Christ could literally end up in us regularly being put in jail.

I think about the Christians in communist China who often have to baptize their children in little lakes and ponds in the middle of the night so that the Communist Party of China won't see them. And their children, if they're seen doing that, will be kept out of the good schools, will not be able to have a full life. So here we are. God's given us this incredible blessing to be born here in a nation, built on the idea that we were made in His image, and it seems to me to be the ultimate ingratitude to not take care of this gift that He gave us.

Dr. Owen Strachan:

It just tends to be the case for us with our fallen nature, that we don't, a lot of us anyway, take stock of where we are and realize what we have in terms of God's kindness until we are in the 11th hour and things are about to collapse and everything is about to be stripped away. That's when a lot of people start to wake up. So what I'm trying to do, in this e-book, and I know you're trying to do in your corner of things, is even more than getting really frustrated with my fellow Christians, I'm trying to say we have an opportunity, and joy is a stronger motivator than fear. We have an opportunity to make a dent in the cosmos by the grace of God.

And part of what I do a little bit in this book is I go to Esther and I go to Daniel and I go to Joseph, for example, in the Old Testament, and then I go to John the Baptist, and then I go to Paul in the New Testament. It's interesting, Gary, we know about the Old Testament figures. God called Esther, Daniel and Joseph into the public square. They weren't like out on the street corner with a sign saying, "Please put me in a major position in a pagan government." I'd love to do that today. But in all three cases, God put them there and used them in amazing ways. So does God care about the world? Does God care about secular government? You bet your britches, He does.

And then when it comes to the New Testament, I'll just go to Paul. Paul actually uses, as you well know, his Roman citizenship in Acts 22 to delay his execution and keep on preaching the gospel. That, again, is an opportunity, let me frame it positively, for Christians to see that you don't choose between caring about your national citizenship or caring about preaching Christ. The two work together. And ideally, if you've got a lot of blessing in your life, you've got a citizenship that is taken seriously by the government and you've got rights and liberties, and that leads to more proclamation of Jesus. So we don't want one or the other. We want both.

Gary Bauer:

Sure. Yeah. So these individuals, particularly in the Old Testament, well, I guess in all these cases, they're speaking truth to power, and that's what God was calling them to do. Owen, years ago, I remember a national prayer breakfast. I'm almost positive Bill Clinton was president at the time. And Mother Teresa was invited to speak at the National Prayer breakfast that Bill Clinton attended. And everybody wondered, "Gee, I wonder how that's going to work out. Will she sort of avoid the conflicts even then that there were in America about various things?"

Well, we didn't have to wait long because Mother Teresa made an impassioned plea for the sanctity of life. She said that she was in India where babies were born and left in the gutter, and she and her ministry were rescuing them and taking care of them. But here in Rich America, babies were being aborted because they were inconvenient and nobody wanted them. And then she paused, and I'm paraphrasing, obviously, but she looked at the audience, and as I recall, she looked at the President and she said, "Give me your babies. If you don't want your babies, I'll take your babies back to India and we will take care of them." And the entire room gave her a standing ovation.

Now, of course, she was immediately condemned in the media for the awkwardness that she made for President Clinton, but it was such a wonderful example of just speaking truth to power in a loving way. She didn't call the president any names. She didn't accuse him of being a murderer, but she went to the central point. Children are made in the image of God. If you don't want them, we'll take care of them in India. I can't think of a better way to convict America than to say India would do a better job of this than we would. What an amazing moment that was.

Dr. Owen Strachan:

I remember that from years past. And in similar terms, I remember another prayer breakfast moment where Eric Metaxas had just written his *Bonhoeffer* book, the one that took the world by storm about 15 years ago or so. And President Obama was sitting there, and Metaxas just unloaded with the biblical worldview and different dimensions in his Metaxasian way, but he did it with humor and good cheer. And that even there, Gary, it can be a rebuke to me because it's not that the days fail to be serious. We're in very serious days. But I do think there's something of that happy warrior to call to action today, and I think that's even what you see when you go to these New and Old Testament figures who stood for God in evil days. They had the sun on their face even in the hard situations because they were following the true God.

And so when I talk about these kind of issues to fellow Christians, there's a lot of gloom. There's a lot of dejection, there's a lot of, well, even if the church is rallied today, Owen, the election could easily be stolen. There's lots of different places this conversation goes. I'm not over here trying to candidate for the next Pollyanna of America and just be walking around with a dumb smile on my face. But what I do want to do is promote hope. There is hope in God, but that hope, Gary, shouldn't cause us to sit back and do nothing and pat ourselves on the

back for being hopeful. To use the metaphor I keep using, we should put our boots on and even get a little mud on them.

Gary Bauer: Absolutely. Owen, one of the problems with our country not teaching history very effectively is that it's hard to learn from history if nobody's teaching it to us. And I keep thinking back at... Eric Metaxas, you mentioned him. He wrote this incredible book about the Christian Church and the 1930s in Germany. And while we love the heroes in the church that hid Jews in their attics, et cetera, many of the churches did no such thing. And they not only didn't do that, they brought the crooked cross of Nazism right into the church and displayed it next to the cross of Jesus Christ. And I think Eric has pointed out that after all that horror was over, many of those pastors and churches still existed. And just think of the guilt they must have felt looking back at their inaction that led to what ended up following it, right?

Dr. Owen Strachan: Yes.

Gary Bauer: Well, you don't even have to go to Germany. You can just look at the United States. We had a big debate in the 1850s whether one man could own another man. And Lincoln famously said, "No, because no man is born with a saddle on his back and another man born with spurs to ride him," right?

Dr. Owen Strachan: Amen.

Gary Bauer: But the Christian Church, particularly in the South, would not often address the issue for some of the same excuses that we're hearing today about the life issue, euthanasia, many other things. Oh, well, it will alienate the biggest donor we have who owns the plantation down the road with a whole bunch of slaves.

Now, obviously, history shows what a terrible choice that was, but it's now, in the history of American Christendom, that's a sad chapter. We don't want to think about that. That churches that followed Jesus Christ were rationalizing the idea that one man could own another man.

Dr. Owen Strachan: Right.

Gary Bauer: My goodness, Owen. This conversation is fantastic. I've got about 20 more questions here. I know how busy you are because all of us at JDFI are busy just trying to keep up with everything that's happening. But could you spare us another day tomorrow to talk some more about this requirement of Christian citizenship?

Dr. Owen Strachan: It would be such an honor, Gary. Thank you. I'd love to.

Roger Marsh: Well, be sure to join Gary Bauer and our own Dr. Owen Strachan, for the conclusion of this conversation coming up on tomorrow's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Now if you'd like to learn more about Dr. Owen Strachan

or the new Dobson Culture Center, go to drjamesdobson.org/culture-center. That's drjamesdobson.org/culture-center.

Now, the crux of today's conversation here on Family Talk featured Gary Bauer and Owen's conversation about Dr. Strachan's brand-new e-book called *Voting and the Church: Why Christians Engage the Public Square*. This e-book is available for you to download absolutely free when you visit us online at a special website we set up for this purpose. Go to drjamesdobson.org/engage and you can sign up to receive your free e-book by Dr. Owen Strachan called *Voting and the Church: Why Christians Engage the Public Square*. Again that's drjamesdobson.org/engage.

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I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of Dr. James Dobson, Gary Bauer, and the rest of the JDFI team, thanks so much for listening. Join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

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