



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Standing Up for Righteousness and Defending the Good News – Part 1

**Guest(s):** John Stemberger

**Air Date:** August 19, 2024

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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:** Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. When you think about it, God is very good at using one person or maybe a small group of people to make a change. For example, think about David versus Goliath. We all know that story. Or how about Gideon? He gathered a small collective to fight the Midianite army in a moment where the Israelites were outnumbered about four to one. So how can we relate to that in the modern era?

Well, let me put it to you this way by asking another question. What does it mean to be an active citizen in the world today? Now, the basic definition of active citizen is a person who gets involved in their community and the democratic process. For example, they will vote in all the elections, attend local school board meetings or city council meetings for that matter, or maybe even be an involved volunteer in the community.

Now, you might be thinking, well, that sounds great for some people, but I'm really too busy to do all that. But what happens when we as Christians don't step in and take care of our communities and our neighborhoods? Well, the chaotic and challenging circumstances that are surrounding many of us right now are perhaps the result of a lack of active Christian citizenship. Just imagine what God would do if a few more of us would start to become more involved in our communities. Well, if that piques your interest, then turn up the volume for today's program. Gary Bauer is joined by his guest, John Stemberger, to talk about this and more. Let's join Gary now as he introduces John a bit more for us to start today's edition of Family Talk.

**Gary Bauer:** Hello everybody, I'm Gary Bauer, the senior vice president of public policy here at the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm also the host of the Defending Faith Family and Freedom Podcast here at the JDFI, and I'm honored to serve alongside my good friend, Dr. James Dobson. We're very happy that you're joining us today.

Look, it's no secret I hope to any listener that God gave us all certain unalienable rights. Not government. God did that. They're clearly outlined in the Declaration of Independence. It's what makes America different from any other country in the world. Unfortunately, many of us may even take those rights for granted as we go about our daily lives, but our founding fathers who were led by their deep faith in God, respect for human dignity, honor, and justice, they put their very lives on the line to establish a country where generations of Americans could enjoy the freedom that they fought so hard for. We're the beneficiaries of those sacrifices.

In today's America, our God-given liberties are under attack by big government, powerful corporations, and a culture all too often hostile to faith, family, and freedom. We need warriors to step up in order to save this nation as one nation under God. And we are very fortunate today to have one of those warriors. Our guest, John Stemberger. John is the president of the Liberty Council Action and he's senior counsel for Liberty Council. He's also a civil trial lawyer with his own private practice. He's a busy guy. He's the former president of the Florida Family Policy Council where he served for nearly 20 years. John earned his Juris Doctorate from Stanford University. In 1987 he founded the Institute for Conservative Studies as a permanent student-led think tank at Florida State University.

Given all the things we saw on TV this year on various campuses, we could use about a thousand of those think tanks, I think. In 1992, John was appointed as the political director of the Republican Party of Florida during the final campaign of former President George HW Bush. John is often quoted and seen as an expert even in liberal publications like the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *NPR*. John, Dr. Dobson and his wife Shirley, send you their best regards. It's a pleasure to have you on the program today.

John Stemberger: Thanks, Gary. It's great to see you again and to be with you on the show.

Gary Bauer: Well, thank you. John, I hope most people know what a family policy council is, but I suspect they don't. And the history of the family policy councils and they're in a number of states around America, go all the way back to Dr. Dobson and Focus on the Family, and at the time, many of those years I was president of the Family Research Council. I'm not sure exactly now where the founding of the Florida Family Policy Council fits into that, but can you tell us a little bit about why these state organizations are so important and how people can get involved in them?

John Stemberger: Yeah. Well, after Dr. Dobson helped to form Family Research Council in Washington, D.C., which you are a former president of, he suddenly realized that a lot of the battles regarding family and domestic law-related issues are state-based battles. They're not federal battles because the states are really, that's the proper jurisdiction for those. He began to think that, well, we need an institution in the various states. And so the concept and the birth of the idea of the family policy councils came from Dr. Dobson. He is the brainchild of that.

And he helped define the funding and the structures for the first policy councils. And so that's kind of the history of what happened.

Now there's about 42, I believe, states that have state-based family policy councils, and I was very privileged to lead the one in Florida for almost 20 years before becoming president of Liberty Council Action founded by Mat Staver here in Maitland, Florida. But it's a nationwide organization.

Gary Bauer: John, it really is kind of amazing because thinking back on those years, one of the reasons that Dr. Dobson gave birth to the Family Research Council was this awareness that in Washington, D.C. where you've got lobbyists that represent everybody imaginable from the Plumbers Union to trade associations, et cetera, there really wasn't one identifiable organization lobbying for arguably the most important special interest in the country, which is the American family. And sadly, the situation was the same in many state capitals, and I'm sure you could regale us with what a lot of stories about what it was like to start visiting state legislators and saying to him them, "I'm John Stemberger and I'm here to represent the Florida families."

John Stemberger: Yeah. The movement started out with just issues being an educational 501(c)(3), and then they suddenly realized in order to affect these issues, we have to have the right policy makers. We can't just advocate for good policy. We have to have the right people. And so having a bill is not enough. You have to ride the right people. And so we began to then form 501(c)(4) organizations, which are action lobbying organizations. So many of the groups have action, Florida Family Action, Florida Family Policy Council. And then eventually we started engaging in full-blown electioneering communications with campaigns.

We realized if we don't have the right people in office, we want to be able to put out bad people and put in good people. So many of the policy councils also engaged in direct electioneering activities where they actually advocated for and against candidates and said, "This guy's good and this guy's bad, and here's why you should vote for him."

So we've kind of come full circle from educational lobbying now to engaging directly in elections as a movement.

Gary Bauer: Sure. Well, that brings me to what is even today, after several decades, a big controversy in the church in the United States, and that is the split between those who as Christians believe we have a biblical obligation, particularly if you live in a free society and are blessed with the freedom of religion to be an active citizen, to be involved in the process of choosing our leaders. And those that in our country today think that politics is dirty. Christians have nothing to do with it. We're not citizens of this world. We're citizens of the next. Which in a big sense, of course is ultimately true.

But John, I can't think of a problem facing America that can be solved without Christians being at the table. Could you talk about that a little bit? How frustrating has it been for you over the years in Florida to get the church in Florida or churches involved in helping to pick the good leaders and good policies?

John Stemberger: I think it's becoming increasingly challenging. It's partly because of bad theology. There's three reasons why pastors and churches don't think about these issues or engage in these issues. Number one is because they're scared of the IRS. I think that's the least issue now. I mean, more and more people understand that that's just a paper tiger. There's really nothing there. The IRS has never invoked anyone's tax status. In fact, churches don't even need a 501(c)(3) letter. They're automatically 501(c)(3). They're tax-exempt from the Foundation of the Republic under the First Amendment. So they don't even need that letter from the IRS. Number two-

Gary Bauer: That is so important.

John Stemberger: And that's not true for every nonprofit. That's only true for churches.

Gary Bauer: Yes.

John Stemberger: Other nonprofits do need 501(c)(3) letters. The second reason they don't engage is because of a bad theology, believing somehow that the church is an institution that shouldn't engage in culture, that it should be only focused on ecclesiastical matters and theology and this kind of thing.

Then the third reason I think is because the blue-haired ladies in the congregation. The politics. If you mention one more time about that issue or that candidate, I'm going to pull my ties. I think that is really the biggest thing is fear. Fear of the congregation, fear of man. Those issues I think are the predominant issues as to why pastors and churches don't engage. So we just need to have a certain courage, a certain resilience if you will, to realize this is important enough that we need to be willing to offend or to ... and that's what pastors should be doing is teaching and preaching and leading their people.

They don't have to change their theology. They don't have to change their services. We just tell people, look, once every two years, you need to let people know there's an election. You have something to steward, right? It's like money. If you don't use your money correctly, your vote is something you should steward before God as a good citizen. So it's not a radical thing, it's just something we should incorporate. We should be full citizens, full human beings, full participants in society. It doesn't have to be a crazy radical thing. It's just something that we're being responsible here.

If you don't talk about politics, if you don't talk about elections, you're not being responsible because it's a whole area of society. It's an area that God has

dominion over and wants, cares about, that affects families, affects children, affects whether you have food on the table, all these things are affected by it. And so it's just an area of life that pastors need to say, this is a normal part of our church life. We're going to talk about elections every two years and we're going to equip people with voter guides or whatever it is. And it doesn't have to be a big deal. It just has to be a deal. It has to be something that's incorporated as a part of the life of the church.

Gary Bauer: I know you're a student of history, John, and when you look back at the country from the very beginning, pastors played a leading role in all the big moments in America. It was the colonial pastors and their emotional sermons from the pulpit during the period when we were experiencing tyranny from the King that rallied people trying to think through these issues and led to the very formation of the country. And you can go on up through the Great Awakening before the Civil War that led ultimately to the end of slavery, the civil rights movement. It was the Reverend Martin Luther King who based his whole civil rights movement on this central belief that we're all made in the image of God, and by being made in the image of God, we had dignity, value, and worth.

And so you can just look at that rich history. And of course, all during those periods, a good bit of the country embraced the Judeo-Christian worldview. So here we are today when that worldview is under attack and so many churches are heading for the tall grass, there used to be what was called an election sermon given the Sunday before Election Day.

John Stemberger: That's right. David Martin shows original copies of election sermons where they would call out the bad guy, explain why he is bad, and then say, this is the good guy, vote for this guy. It's really remarkable given where we're at now,

Gary Bauer: There's a local pastor in the Washington, D.C. area, Gary Hamrick runs a church in Northern Virginia. He's been giving an election sermon. Now, he doesn't actually say who to vote for. He just says, as a Christian, here are the issues you should use to judge the candidates. And his church is growing by leaps and bounds for a lot of reasons, but one reason is because he provides that guidance for Christian citizenship.

John Stemberger: Yep. He's unapologetic. That's a great church and a great example of how you can be fully engaged as a citizen, encourage people to vote, encourage active citizenship, and still have an active growing church.

Gary Bauer: I do think, it's not funny, but it's revealing, John, that there are constant messages in our country urging people to get involved in the political process. People want more young people to vote. They want more old people to vote. They want to make it easier to vote. They want to be able to have an election month or two months rather than an election day. So that's a constant message until a Christian says, "We need to get more Christians involved." And then suddenly it's a threat to the Republic.

John Stemberger: Right. Christian nationalism, every election cycle, it's a new thing, right?

Gary Bauer: Yes.

John Stemberger: Reconstructionist. It's theonomist. Now it's this year, it's the Christian nationalist, and it's just people that want to just engage and the process that happened to be people of faith. And again, they're trying to demonize all of us who are Christians trying to engage as citizens.

Gary Bauer: Yeah. Dr. Dobson, and I've talked about this a number of times, so a Christian is somebody that loves Jesus, and nationalist is really sort of another word about being super patriotic. A Christian nationalist would be somebody that loved Jesus and really loved America. Well, that's a description of 99% of the American population from 1776 up to about last Thursday.

John Stemberger: That's right.

Gary Bauer: And now suddenly it's something very controversial. Where do you see America? President Trump's first term in office? People either loved him or hated him, but one of the things he did was appoint three pretty darn good Supreme Court justices. And before those appointments, I think most people like you and me and Dr. Dobson felt that everything was hanging by a thread, not the least of which was religious liberty. And now we've gotten some great cases out of the court related to religious liberty.

John Stemberger: I'm very encouraged. I think that it's important that we not look at the circumstances, Gary, that we just fight for principle. When we just get on this emotional roller coaster of, oh, we just lost, we just won. Are we going to win? Are we going to lose? To me, the battle is just focus on the principle. Focus on fighting with all your might, using all the resources that you have, and just be faithful to do that thing. We have to have this holy resilience to setbacks and failure. This is how Wilberforce defeats the slave trade in the United Kingdom, because he for 20 some odd years, every year just said, I'm going to continue to fight. And he's standing on principle that's timeless, that every human being rich or poor, black or white handicapped or whole is made in the image and likeness of God, and he's so passionate about this principle. He fights and fights even when he loses over and over again, and he literally sees the abolition of slave trade in the entire kingdom right before his death, days before his death because he was resilient.

You know, you wrote a chapter in a book we just published, *Legacy of Life*, honoring 50 of the greatest pro-life leaders from the last 50 years, and we almost didn't name the book *Legacy of Life*. We almost named it *Resilience*. That was the one characteristic, as I read each one of the tributes to the 50 leaders, including Ronald Reagan, which you wrote, we realized that, wow, these are men and women that were resilient. And in the face of opposition, in the face of hatred, in the face of setbacks, they said, no, we're going to continue to stand.

And I think that's what we need to focus on, is just not looking at what's happening around us, but just being committed to the very end. As long as God gives us breath, we need to fight, we need to stand. We need to do what's right in that way.

Gary Bauer: That's a great point, John, and it's a little sad that often we don't have resilience. We lose a battle, and we kind of slink away and well, maybe God didn't want to win. I don't know. Maybe God wanted us to work harder. Who can discern what He might want in a particular battle? But ironically, other movements not based on biblical values, the LGBTQ movement, for example, they set out to change the definition of marriage that had been in place for several millennium. They've written books about how they did it, how they changed people's minds, how they wore people down. Remember all those years when it was on the ballot, and they kept losing those referendum, didn't they?

John Stemberger: Yep. And that's the thing. We need to have a long run game. We can't think about the short run all the time. I think we're always focused on the next election. How are we going to win? We need to also be thinking about the long run. What's the long game? Who's going to be here 10, 20 years from now? Who are our leaders? What are we doing to raise people up? I think we need to be much more focused on the long game as we are the short game.

Gary Bauer: Absolutely. John, how shocked were you by this trans movement that I think for most Americans seemed to come out of nowhere? Now, as I've gotten more involved in it, there were a lot of signs that this was building up and a lot of work was being done behind the scenes. But all of a sudden, this notion that we're assigned our gender at birth and that you might be in the wrong body, it became the accepted wisdom in school systems and corporations and in the popular culture. It just seems to many people, it almost have happened overnight.

John Stemberger: Well, in the battle for the definition of what a marriage is, we always said that once you redefine this, once you say that men and women and gender has no relevance to the raising of kids, then you're going to unlock all types of nonsense. And this is exactly what we have in the transgender movement. What's really remarkable is that with the same speed that they gained success and gained influence, they're also losing influence now because the ideas are so radical, they're so crazy. They're so antithetical to just common sense, involving child abuse, involving the destruction of children's lives. These are permanent irreversible changes that they're encouraging children to literally with crazy, no science, no referee journals to back up the science of this. It's just kind of a leap into ideological space, which many corporations are just swallowing whole.

But why? Because the fear. They don't want to have backlash. They don't want to have HRC or whoever it is, rate them badly or something.

Gary Bauer: That's the Human Rights Campaign, which is our counterpart. They're the big LGBTQ lobby group that wields a lot of power and has a lot of money.

John Stemberger: Yeah. And I think when you look at Chloe Cole, she was a person that was a young lady who thought she was born in a man's body, and so she began to transition. She had her breasts removed, she began to take hormones. She said that she learned about this, Gary, not even at school, she learned about it on Instagram.

And so this stuff is being pumped into social media. And so I'm feverish about letting parents say, we need to protect our kids from these devices. They're pouring garbage and filth and unimaginable lies into our children's minds. I think the greatest thing a parent could do right now is control the amount of media. The media and the schools are the two big institutions that are literally indoctrinating our children and changing the next generation's minds. And those are the two institutions we need to be very wary of and create counter institutions to combat these ideas.

Gary Bauer: John, what you just said, as you know, Dr. Dobson's audience his entire career has been those mothers and fathers out there trying to raise their children with godly principles and help them navigate the shoals of life. There's always been challenges growing up in any country, but the challenges now are extraordinary. And you just touched on something that I know Dr. Dobson feels really strongly about. We've seen this parents revolt in the schools, and that's been very encouraging.

But when the kids are home, we can't relax. If they're up in their room and you don't hear any noise, you shouldn't assume everything's okay. I know that more and more parents, and it's tough for them, but they're beginning to rethink how early, for example, a child should be given access to a smartphone that has access to the internet, because that can be a pathway to being exposed to things that can really put that child on the wrong path.

Roger Marsh: Our children's schools and social media wield a significant amount of influence in their lives. It's important for us as parents to make the right choices for our families so we could protect our children from outside persuasions. Well, you just heard part one of Gary Bauer's powerful conversation with attorney John Stemberger here on Family Talk. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of this powerful interview. Now, if you'd like to learn more about John Stemberger, just visit our website at [www.drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://www.drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

When you think about it, there's really no better way to be an active Christian citizen right now than being an informed Christian citizen who votes. The upcoming elections are as important as ever. So be sure to keep your eye out for the decision 2024 resources from the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. They'll start dropping next week as they say. We have videos, voter guides, and more.

Let's make sure we can make a positive impact by standing together with our vote. And you can learn more about those voting resources when you check out the James Dobson Family Institute's Dobson Culture Center. Culture is all around



us. We can't escape it. That's why we have established the Dobson Culture Center to help equip families and individuals develop a stronger biblical foundation. Now, the ultimate mission of the DCC is to strengthen Christians by teaching that a biblical worldview is the cornerstone for marriage, parenting, and preserving human dignity.

Dr. Owen Strachan is the new leader of the Dobson Culture Center, and he's a firm believer that if we as Christians will stand for the truth, even when it's hard to do, we can have a positive impact on culture and provide hope and a better future for generations to come. Now, you can visit the Dobson Culture Center quite easily when you go to [www.drjamesdobson.org](http://www.drjamesdobson.org) just click on the Culture Center tab at the top of our homepage. And while you're there, you can make sure you stay up to date on content and resources from the DCC by signing up for the free "Lighting Up Culture Weekly Report".

Again, to access the Dobson Culture Center, just go to [www.drjamesdobson.org](http://www.drjamesdobson.org) and click on the Culture Center tab. Or if you prefer, go to [www.drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://www.drjamesdobson.org/familytalk) and you can click the link on the bottom of today's broadcast page as well. Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for joining us today, and be sure to join us again tomorrow for the second part of Gary Bauer and John Stemberger's discussion about Christian citizenship. You won't want to miss it. Coming up tomorrow right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

Roger Marsh: Hey everyone. Roger Marsh here. When you think about your family and where they will be when you're no longer living, are you worried? Are you confident? Are you hopeful? What kind of legacy are you leaving for your children and their children? Here at Family Talk we're committed to helping you understand the legacy that you're leaving for your family. Join us today at [www.drjamesdobson.org](http://www.drjamesdobson.org) for helpful insights, tips, and advice from Dr. James Dobson himself, and remember, your legacy matters.