



**Libertarian Christians**  
**Guest: Norman Horn**  
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*Norman Horn is chief editor of [LibertarianChristians.com](http://LibertarianChristians.com).*

**WOODS:** I have had a lot of people say that this topic needs to be raised: Christianity and libertarianism, libertarian Christians, Christian libertarians—is this a contradiction or not? That is an interesting topic for discussion, and who better to feature on this program than Norman Horn of [LibertarianChristians.com](http://LibertarianChristians.com)? So let's start off with this most important question, and look at the issue of the compatibility or otherwise of libertarianism and Christianity. Now let me tell you something that I think some conservatives might say about libertarian Christianity. I think some conservatives might say that these are people who already have a libertarian commitment, and they want to be Christians, but they'd rather be libertarians, so in a very tendentious way they look for what they want to find in Christianity, and then lo and behold, they find it. Is that an accurate accusation?

**HORN:** Yeah, I think that's a—that often happens with libertarians. They are, and it goes both ways, too. There are two primary problems, actually, when Christians look at libertarianism, and it goes back to the left/right dichotomy that we like to talk about at times. On the one hand we have the conservative Christians who see some sort of role for government. They might have some libertarianish thoughts and processes in their minds, but they just can't see a world where government doesn't have control over a lot of things. So these are the people who do believe that we need strong defense, that we need, some type of management of the economy, various things like that, and [without this government role] we're going to descend into anarchy and everything is going to be terrible. On the other hand, we have the more left-leaning Christians who see as a problem that libertarians suggest free-market capitalism is the answer to so many things, and their perspective is that we need the government to help the poor. We need the government to fight poverty. We need the government to help people. The Christian libertarian gets to stand in the gap on all of these sides whether it be the conservative Christians, the more liberal-leaning Christians, or the atheist libertarians and say look, there is a middle ground here. Libertarianism is actually the best political expression of Christian theological thought that we have. We talk to the right and we say, look, you don't need to have a strong state in order to have order, and then you go to the left and you say, we don't need some type of welfare state in order to take care of the poor, and then you go to the atheist side of the libertarians and say look, Christians can really support the cause of liberty. It's in all of our interests to work together.

**WOODS:** You're talking about the issue of the poor. The welfare state—where is the welfare state called for in the New Testament that you can see?

**HORN:** Well, in my opinion, nowhere.

**WOODS:** No, I don't see it either, but yet they assume it's there! Right?

**HORN:** Yeah, they try to hearken back to a few things that Jesus says. They'll criticize wealth, more often than not through the narrative about the rich man who comes to Jesus and is told, "Sell all your possessions and give to the poor." The other place that a lot of Christians look to is the early church, in Acts, where people held all things in "common." But in each case, even though these things happened, there is an assumption of private property involved, and that puts forward an ethical system, and that is also laid forth throughout the rest of the Bible as well. I think that's one of the cool things about the connection between libertarianism and Christianity: throughout our theological heritage as Christians, there's either a tacit assumption or an explicit pronouncement of private-property rights. I think that's significant, and I think it's

very underappreciated throughout all Christian traditions for the most part these days.

**WOODS:** There's also the fact that the wealthiest countries and the countries where the poor suffer the fewest deprivations happen to be the countries where private property is the most respected. So just from a utilitarian point of view, the poor are taken care of the best in the countries where there is the least government involved. I don't think that's even debatable; just consult the statistics. But then just on a human level, I think it's not unfair to say that the spirit of the New Testament is one in which human beings are interacting with other human beings—that there's a meeting of hearts, a meeting of souls, one to another, and I don't see that in a government bureaucracy mailing a check to some guy.

**HORN:** That's absolutely right. One of the neatest things that I see in the New Testament is a renewed sense of both individuality and community. In the ancient world, for the most part, it was very collectivistic almost regardless of where you looked, whether you are observing the Roman Empire, or an ancient Hittite, most of the time you're looking at a collectivist-type society. But what the New Testament seems to suggest is that you can't have community without a proper understanding of individuality, and so this understanding that we have of what—who an individual is before God—allows us then to develop a theology of the community of God together, and along with that is accompanying ethics, and part of that is our view of property rights, and to me I see this in such a grand connection between the way we think about individualism and communities in libertarian theory too. I see these as concordant theories, and they support one another, and it's why I think that the idea of a Christian libertarianism is really important for the future of liberty itself.

**WOODS:** Now you have two posts, by the way, am I saying the site correctly, LibertarianChristians.com?

**HORN:** That's right, yeah, LibertarianChristians.com has been around since actually 2008 now.

**WOODS:** Wow! Okay, so you guys have some heft and some staying power. That's good. Okay, you've got two posts there.

**HORN:** Yeah, there's literally hundreds of posts on there, and we'll talk about it, you know, I am sure a few of them. That's great.

**WOODS:** Well, in particular you have two where you take five at a time, five ways in which there's compatibility between Christianity and libertarianism. We've already hit on one or two, but take us through a few more.

**HORN:** Sure, yeah. Well, one of the things that I really try to emphasize a lot in my writings is our view of the state. We can talk a lot about economics and the reasons why the free market is best for Christians to promote—why it's good for poverty, why it's good for human flourishing, why it's good for the church, but on the other side of that is: how does the Bible actually view the state? Well, in my opinion, and granted I have done a lot of study on this, but I know there are differing things out there, Christianity and the Bible consistently side with those people who are oppressed by government. Whether you are looking at pre-Israelite history, pre-history if you will, stories of people in Genesis who were oppressed by the states they were in, you see God being on their side. You see the people of Israel in Exodus while they were slaves. God was on their side, and he is always interested in freeing people from bondage. This goes into the full narrative of the Gospels, which is that we're not just being oppressed by government, but we're being oppressed by the evil itself. The sin that within us is part of what is oppressing us. We are both being oppressed by it and we are the oppressors. The liberating aspect of the Gospels is that we are made free from sin and free to do good things in a new way, and so that in a sense could be somewhat beyond the scope of libertarianism is reinforcing [CHECK] to us as Christian—that liberty is a primary aspect of the Gospel message.

**WOODS:** What about Romans 13? A critic might come back at you and say Romans 13 is a recipe for blindly acceding to tyranny. Now, first of all, tell us what Romans 13 is all about, and then share with us what your thoughts are on Romans 13.

**HORN:** Sure. Romans 13 is a passage written by Paul. It seems to somewhat come out of nowhere at times when you are reading the whole of the epistle, but it basically starts off saying that the powers that be are ordained by God, and they are there for your good, and so this is why you should pay taxes and what not. So people often look at this, and they just say this is the justification of the state in the Bible, without really going into the whole of the context, without looking at the whole context of Romans and the whole context of the scripture itself. In my estimate of the best way to interpret this thing, especially in light of the context where in the prior chapter, we're encouraged to do good to all men, I think it makes best sense as a prudential

passage. Oftentimes some people get really excited about libertarian thought, and sometimes they think that the best way of resisting is some kind of very active—you know, let's put my entire family on the line sort of thing. I don't think that's necessarily the way we should go.

Our message as Christians is not necessarily that we're trying to overthrow government all the time. That's not our point. Our mission in life is to be vessels of the Gospel, to be able to tell other people about Christ and to bring them to a better knowledge of Him. This has a liberty values [CHECK] too in that the more that we can bring people over to that side, the more people will be inclined, hopefully, to endorse and approve of these liberty values. So if we look at it from a prudential point of view, we say well, the reason that I am not going to be a tax resistor right off the bat is because I don't want to get thrown in jail for anything other than the promotion of the Gospel. As long as I can be a vehicle of the Gospel, I want to be careful in how I resist, and I think that is a message that's well taken in especially in this day and age where we're seeing a lot more of this type of resistance, and we may need to be careful about that. But I think a more important point, honestly, is that people seem to miss what the rest of the Bible says about the state. I have a post you can find on the front page of [LibertarianChristians.com](http://LibertarianChristians.com). I love it. I called it, "Theology Doesn't Begin and End with Romans 13." And in it I talk a little bit about a whole bunch of other examples throughout the scripture that suggests the state is terrible, from the origin story of the state being the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 to the end destiny of the state in the book of Revelation, with the example after example of the state being the enemy of God and a vehicle of evil. Now if we are to be vehicles of good in the Gospel, then that needs to be something we need to understand, and we need to oppose the state as it is in acting evil against other people and as a vehicle of oppression.

**WOODS:** Norman, in the early church you don't see any attempt on the part of the Christian community to overthrow the officials of the Roman Empire or challenge them openly. They would not serve in the army, they would refuse to cooperate in certain ways, but there was no attempt to overthrow them. The Christians by and large were obedient to commands that they believed were not obviously opposed to God's law. But as the centuries go on, and you get to people like John of Salisbury, and then you get to the later Scholastics—Juan de Mariana is a spectacular example, but there are numerous others who taught the possibility of tyrannicide—that it could be legitimate to, in fact, kill the ruler. Which of these two traditions do you think is the correct one in terms of, I don't know, biblical theology?

**HORN:** I would say I am not a pacifist by any means, but I tend to side with more of the early Christians in many respects because I think that that has ultimately a greater long-term effect over time than the other. I mean, as we have seen, even in America's history, yes, we overthrew England, but where are we now? Did overthrowing the government then ultimately, you know, be—was that the best thing that could have ever happened? Is there a better way that something could have occurred? Probably so. Another really good example of this, I think, is actually the example of the Civil War. So many people believe, for instance, that the Civil War was a good thing because hey, we freed slaves, and okay, sure, that happened, but they forget how many times throughout history slavery has been abolished without firing a shot. Indeed, in England in the early half of the nineteenth century, William Wilberforce and his followers managed to create an entire changed culture through just a generation or two and managed to free all the slaves and abolish the slave trade without doing any type of violence whatsoever. That to me is the better example of revolution than let's take up arms alone.

**WOODS:** Norman, within the libertarian world there are a lot of people who are indifferent to Christianity, and there are a lot of people who are extremely hostile toward it, and one thing they will say to somebody like you—apart from the flying spaghetti monster nonsense, which, by the way, I can refute that in five minutes, so don't anybody ever give me the flying spaghetti monster stuff because then I am going to quiz you on Thomas Aquinas, because I know for a fact you couldn't have read him if you think it's equally plausible for the flying spaghetti monster to be a proper object of worship. God can't be material if he's pure actuality! He can't have any matter in him. Anyway, that's a separate issue. But one thing they'll say to you is that it's non-libertarian to subject yourself to some kind of all-powerful being. They believe this is incompatible with libertarianism itself.

**HORN:** Well, presumably, if we're going to follow that line of argument, then they are making the assumption that this God would exist, and if this God exists in his [CHECK] himself that all truth will lead to us, then he's got our good in mind, and he created this world to be win-win for all of us, and that includes being in relationship with this [CHECK]. So it's sort of a misnomer, I think, to just assume that, you know, well, if God is this, [CHECK] therefore anti-libertarian. How do you know that if this God does exist, that he

is not going to be the kind of authoritarian entity that the state is, and in fact that is precisely what we learn in the Bible: this is a God who doesn't just lord it over us but humbles himself to serve, and in fact, to die for us. That is an unparalleled narrative compared to anything out there in the world of religion.

**WOODS:** Well, it seems to me the question boils down to whether God exists or not. This is the unstated assumption of the question. It's like they're saying, why would you invent this God and then subject yourself to him? Well, I agree, that would be stupid. But if I have good reason to believe that this God exists, then every other question you want to ask me about him is moot. I think I am going to do an episode one of these days, it will just be me alone, and I think I am going to call it, "I Am Not an Idiot for Believing in God." It's not going to be mean. It's not going to have an unkind tone. I think I am pretty friendly to all the guests that I have on here, and I would keep this same tone on this episode. I know that I will have some people who are delicate flowers who can't bear to hear an opinion that differs from their own, but I think most of my listeners are a little bit more robust than that, and I think most of them can cope with a thought that differs from theirs, and I want them to understand that it's not just some weird quirk of mine—that I am really good on some issues, but I am totally unreasonable on the question of God. I want to disprove that. But I don't want to take up your whole episode doing it. So I am going to do that separately, but I think I did interrupt you, so do carry on with what you want to say.

**HORN:** Well, I think the key here is what kind of God is it? A lot of these atheists come into the conversation with very much a pre-held disposition towards Christianity itself. They have assumptions that they are bringing to the conversation about what Christianity is, what the Bible says, and so much of it is garbage. Our job in this case, when we're talking to our atheist libertarian friends, is to, well, let's dial down the libertarianism for just a second. Let's talk about God. Let's talk about who this God is and what he said to us, and if we have any reasonable expectation that he's being truthful in his presentation to us about who he is through Scripture, and we have a lot of reason to believe that this is a very good God who has our best interests at heart. Strangely enough, he has his best interests at heart too. In fact, I recently read a book, and this might help some Objectivist libertarians out there: *The Soul of Atlas* by Mark Henderson. You might want to have him on your program sometime. He talks about God as the ultimate egoist who insofar as he desires to be in a relationship with us, he's—we're satisfying our own highest desires and his highest desires at the same time. This created [CHECK] the world the way it is designed is for all of our good, and if we come it from that perspective surely, you know, the atheist libertarian can say, okay, well, maybe there is something different that I didn't understand, and maybe then we can start having conversations that really push the conversation forward. Maybe they will be able to understand us Christians a little better.

**WOODS:** Norman, I noticed on your site that the growth of the libertarian Christian community has been substantial enough that you're thinking about holding a conference, and it hasn't been set in stone yet, but do you want to say a word about that?

**HORN:** Yeah, actually there are things that are—well, it's not just an "if" it's going to happen anymore. This is going to happen. And in fact, I am going to say right now that you should mark the calendar for August 2nd because that is going to be the date of the conference. August 2nd, 2014 in Austin, Texas. Registration for it is going to be open in just a week or less here as we nail down a few more final details. It's really exciting. We've got a good lineup of speakers already, including myself, Jason Rink of the Foundation for a Free Society.

**WOODS:** Yeah, great guy.

**HORN:** And the Executive Director. Yeah, he's a fellow Austinite, fellow, I mean, he's awesome. He's a former pastor—recently put together the nullification documentary if you were part of the Nullify Now Conference as listeners, and you'll remember that, and of course, Tom, you were involved in that too, and it was amazing to see you here in Austin for that. Also, David Thoreux, the President of the Independent Institute is going to be here, and also we're going to have Representative Simpson from Texas here.

**WOODS:** Oh, he's a good guy too, yeah.

**HORN:** A lot of your listeners may not know that name, but what they'll remember potentially is that a couple of years ago there was this fiasco in Texas about the TSA. Well, the guy who was leading that charge was David Stimson who is a wonderful, Christian man who is a reader of LCC. He's been a fan for a long time. I love David to death. I call him the Ron Paul of the Texas legislature. He's fantastic. And so he's coming, too. And we're going to be announcing more speakers here in the coming weeks. Hey, we'd love for

you to come, too, Tom if you get a chance, right? But it's going to be a great time. We're going to learn theology together. We're going to do something that really Christian libertarians haven't had a good opportunity to do in some time, which is we don't know where we all are right now. Even now, we have social networking venues where we talk, we have certain events where we sometimes get together, and we kind of are like, hey, that's a Christian, you know, let's go and let's talk and what not, but we have very rarely had an organized session where we all can gather together, share our thoughts, and share our hearts with each other and do something big and new to promote liberty and to promote an idea of Christian libertarianism in the church today.