

# FOR THE LOVE OF GOD + -

## THE EMPIRE CONVERTS: THE MAKING OF CHRISTENDOM

This segment comes from **EPISODE 4: POWER + HUMILITY**.

The church’s record of holding power – from Emperor Constantine in the 4th century onwards – has involved some terrible acts of coercion, exploitation, and abuse. Yet Jesus set an example of selfless service, and started a “humility revolution” that fundamentally transformed the West and the way we think about leadership and power. For groups like women and indigenous peoples, what has it looked like when Christians have exercised power for their own benefit? What has it looked like when they’ve exercised it for the good of others? This segment looks at how the church’s fraught relationship with power began: with the conversion of Emperor Constantine.

### THEME QUESTIONS

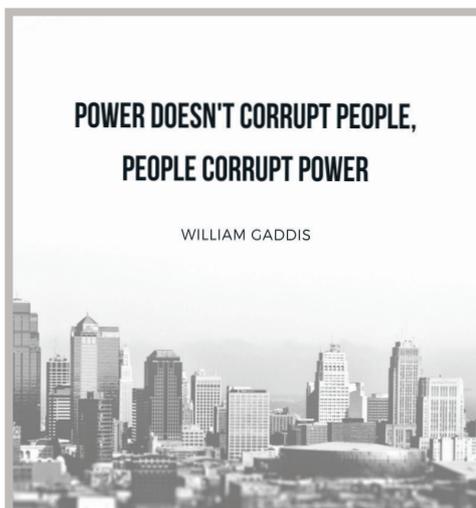
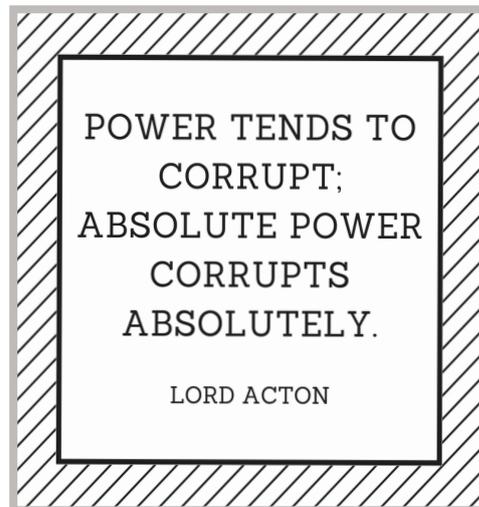
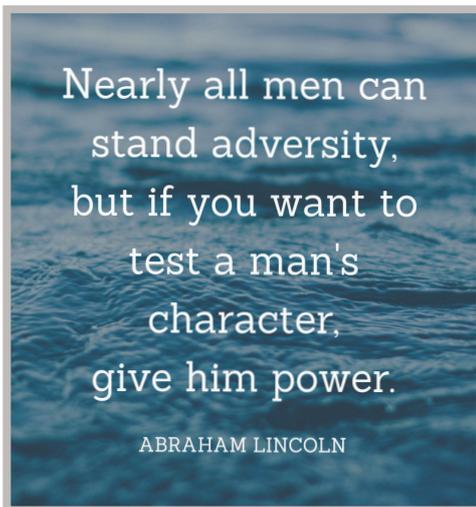
Do you see the church as an organisation that has a “fixation with power”?

### ENGAGE

1. If you had unlimited power for a day, what would you do?
2. Brainstorm some of the ways in which having power can have both positive and negative effects.

Positive effects	Negative effects

3. Read the following quotes about power. Which of these quotes do you most agree with? Explain your answer.



4. Find a recent news article or video about a leader misusing power for their own gain. Compare your article/video with another student. What similarities and differences are there between your examples?

## **UNDERSTAND AND EVALUATE**



**WATCH the segment: “The empire converts: The making of Christendom”**

[cpx.video/power](https://cpx.video/power)

1. When Constantine won against Maxentius in 312 AD and gave the credit to Jesus Christ, what were some of the short-term changes the Christian community experienced?
2. In the video, David Bentley Hart says: “I think it’s fair to say that the greatest historical triumph of Christianity as a cultural force, its conversion to the empire, was in many ways also its greatest defeat.” What does he mean by this?
3. Create a diagram to describe the contrast between the Renaissance Popes and Jesus.
4. What is ironic about the idea of a “warrior-pope”? (See Titus 1:7) Create a meme to show this irony.
5. John G. Stackhouse Jr says: “Christian history is littered with instances of Christians behaving badly when they have a chance to pull the levers of power.” Why do you think this is?
6. Teresa Morgan says that while gaining power during the reign of Emperor Constantine did to some extent corrupt the Christian church, it also had some positive effects as it gave the church opportunities to do what it saw as good. Can you think of any examples where the church has used its power and influence in society for good?

## **BIBLE FOCUS**

**READ Proverbs 3:33-34 and Proverbs 11:2.**

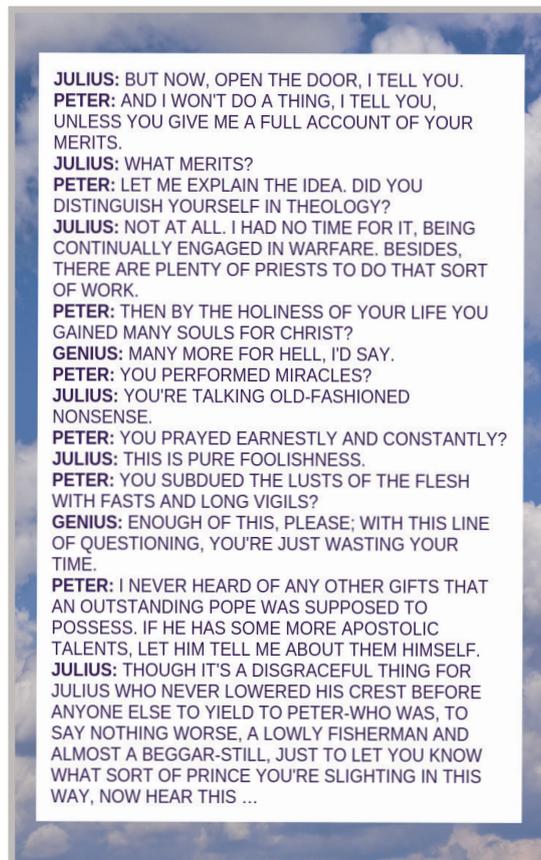
1. What do these proverbs show us about God’s attitude towards those who are proud?
2. Is all pride bad? What kind of pride do you think these verses are talking about?
3. What is the ultimate result of this kind of pride?

**READ 1 Peter 5:1-6.**

4. Create a mind-map of characteristics that this passage says an elder in the church should have.
5. What motivations does the passage give for living this way?
6. What differences do you notice between the instructions in this passage and the way Renaissance popes such as Julius II lived?

**A APPLY**

1. Read the following extract from “[Julius Excluded from Heaven](#)” ([cpx.video/julius](#)), a satire that was written shortly after the death of Julius II, most likely by Erasmus, the leading Christian thinker at the time. The satire is set at the gates of heaven, and contains a dialogue between Julius and the apostle Peter, who is traditionally imagined as the gatekeeper of heaven.



- a. What picture do we get of Julius from this dialogue?
- b. If you could ask five more questions to Julius, what questions would you ask? Write down your questions and Julius' possible answers. Then, role-play your dialogue with another student.

2. Do you think the church still has power and influence in Australian society today? If so, do you think its influence is mostly positive, negative, or neutral? Offer evidence to back up your response.
3. Think of someone you know who displays most of the characteristics listed in the 1 Peter passage.
  - a. What effect does this person have on the people around them?
  - b. How close are you to following their example?

## **EXTEND**

1. Read this article, "[Francis is about authentic Christianity, not PR stunts](https://cpx.video/popefrancis)" (cpx.video/popefrancis) by CPX's Simon Smart. Write a summary of some differences between the life of Pope Francis and the lives of the Renaissance Popes.