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The religion within my family is widespread. The families of my mother and father were both more or less non-religious, while my step-mom’s family are all Christian. I have never had a problem with the differences in household religions, but through this crossover I have gotten a taste of what the world would be like if there were no separation of church and state, and it is not a world I would be comfortable in.

My parents are divorced, and when I was younger I would switch weekends with each parent. Every other Sunday I would attend church with my dad and stepmom. I enjoyed it for a while, but as I grew older it became less of a fun gathering and more like an event I wasn’t invited to. I didn’t appreciate what they were teaching, so going to church made me feel like I was an outsider.

When I asked to stop attending church it became an argument. It was something meaningful to my step-mom, which I appreciated and respected, but it wasn’t the same thing to me. Going made me feel like a hypocrite, and it wasn’t something that needed to be a part of my life. I eventually convinced them to let me follow my own path.

The family debate around church made me think about my life in relation to religion in a broader sense. The separation of church and state became more personal in other areas of my life, from school to my own safety.

I first noticed the separation in my history and health classes. I observed the information we were studying and suspected that, if religion were to govern the classroom, many of these topics would change. Scientific subjects such as evolution could easily be replaced with a religious equivalent, such as creationism in Christianity. Health subjects such as pregnancy and sexual education would likely be censored or pushed aside altogether. The effects of these changes would range from simply inaccurate to very dangerous, especially when considering the health of developing adults.

As I moved upwards into high school I encountered another reason the separation of church and state is a necessary part of my life. With LGBTQ rights a big focus in politics, I observed many arguments based in religion. It made me think about my own life, and the lives around me. I identify as nonbinary, meaning I don’t express gender in a specifically masculine or feminine way. I am very grateful I live in a supportive household and city, but I know there are many places around the world where religion can create intolerance. Recently a close friend of mine was forced to move across the country because their parents, who were Mormon, did not agree with their identity. I had to ask the question, if religion became the rulebook, would I be condemned for who I was?

When I was arguing against going to church, I said to my mom “I believe in science. If I can’t see it, it isn’t real.” While I don’t feel so strongly now, I still hold firmly to the belief that

everyone should be able to worship (or not worship) in whatever way they want, in ways that are not invasively influential to the lives and freedoms of others. Religion and politics are two different things, and mixing them would create a censored and unsafe version of the nation. I firmly believe that this separation is necessary for the balance of politics and the well-being of the people.