Christians and Politics, Part 3
Scripture: Titus 3:1-2; Luke 19:1-10; Acts 10
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LESSONS FROM SCRIPTURE

My point is not that Christians should remain totally uninvolved in politics or civic activities and causes. They ought to express their political beliefs in the voting booth, and it is appropriate to support legitimate measures designed to correct a glaring social or political wrong. Complete noninvolvement would be contrary to what God's Word says about doing good in society: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10; cf. Titus 3:1-2). It would also display a lack of gratitude for whatever amount of religious freedom the government allows us to enjoy. Furthermore, such pious apathy toward government and politics would reveal a lack of appreciation for the many appropriate legal remedies believers in democracies have for maintaining or improving the civil order. A certain amount of healthy and balanced concern with current trends in government and the community is acceptable, as long as we realize that that interest is not vital to our spiritual growth, our righteous testimony, or the advancement of the kingdom of Christ. Above all, the believer's political involvement should never displace the priority of preaching and teaching the gospel.

There is certainly no prohibition on believers being directly involved in government as civil servants, as some notable examples in the Old and New Testaments illustrate. Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon are two excellent models of servants God used in top governmental positions to further His kingdom. The centurion's servant (Matt. 8:5-13), Zaccheus the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10), and Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10) all continued in public service even after they experienced the healing or saving power of Christ. (As far as we know, the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus also remained in office after he was converted [Acts 13:4-12].)

The issue again is one of priority. The greatest temporal good we can accomplish through political involvement cannot compare to what the Lord can accomplish through us in the eternal work of His kingdom. Just as God called ancient Israel (Ex. 19:6), He has called the church to be a kingdom of priests, not a kingdom of political activists. The apostle Peter instructs us, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Jesus, as we would expect, perfectly maintained His Father's perspective on these matters even though He lived in a society that was every bit as pagan and corrupt as today's culture. In many ways

it was much worse than any of us in Western nations has ever faced. Cruel tyrants and dictators ruled throughout the region, the institution of slavery was firmly entrenched--everything was the antithesis of democracy. King Herod, the Idumean vassal of Rome who ruled Samaria and Judea, epitomized the godless kind of autocratic rule: "Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men [concerning the whereabouts of the baby Jesus], was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under" (Matt. 2:16).

Few of us have experienced the sort of economic and legal oppression that the Romans applied to the Jews of Jesus' day. Tax rates were exorbitant and additional government-sanctioned abuses by the tax collectors exacerbated the financial burden on the people. The Jews in Palestine were afforded almost no civil rights and were treated as an underprivileged minority that could not make an appeal against legal injustices. As a result, some Jews were in constant outward rebellion against Rome.

Fanatical nationalists, known as Zealots, ignored their tax obligations and violently opposed the government. They believed that even recognizing a Gentile ruler was wrong (see Deuteronomy 17:15, "You may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother"). Many Zealots became assassins, performing acts of terrorism and violence against both the Romans and other Jews whom they viewed as traitors.

It is also true that the Roman social system was built on slavery. The reality of serious abuses of slaves is part of the historical record. Yet neither Jesus nor any of the apostles attempted to abolish slavery. Instead, they commanded slaves to be obedient and used slavery as a metaphor for believers who were to submit to their Lord and Master.

Jesus' earthly ministry took place right in the midst of that difficult social and political atmosphere. Many of His followers, including the Twelve, to varying degrees expected Him to free them from Rome's oppressive rule. But our Lord did not come as a political deliverer or social reformer. He never issued a call for such changes, even by peaceful means. Unlike many late twentieth-century evangelicals, Jesus did not rally supporters to some grandiose attempt to "capture the culture" for biblical morality or greater political and religious freedoms.

Christ, however, was not devoid of care and concern for the daily pain and hardships people endured in their personal lives. The Gospels record His great empathy and compassion for sinners. He applied those attitudes in a tangible, practical way by healing thousands of people of every kind of disease and affliction, often at great personal sacrifice to Himself.

Still, as beneficial and appreciated as His ministry to others' physical needs was, it was not Jesus' first priority. His divine calling was to speak to the hearts and souls of individual men and women. He

proclaimed the good news of redemption that could reconcile them to the Father and grant them eternal life. That message far surpasses any agenda for political, social, or economic reform that can preoccupy us. Christ did *not* come to promote some new social agenda or establish a new moral order. He *did* come to establish a new spiritual order, the body of believers from throughout the ages that constitutes His church. He did not come to earth to make the old creation moral through social and governmental reform, but to make new creatures holy through the saving power of the gospel and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. And our Lord and Savior has commanded us to continue His ministry, with His supreme priorities in view, with the goal that we might advance His kingdom: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

In the truest sense, the moral, social, and political state of a people is irrelevant to the advance of the gospel. Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36).

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