Christians and Politics, Part 4
Acts 26:18; 1 Peter 2:5; 1 Peter 2:9
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The Real Battle

We can't protect or expand the cause of Christ by human political and social activism, no matter how great or sincere the efforts. Ours is a spiritual battle waged against worldly ideologies and dogmas arrayed against God, and we achieve victory over them only with the weapon of Scripture. The apostle Paul writes: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

We must reject all that is ungodly and false and never compromise God's standards of righteousness. We can do that in part by desiring the improvement of society's moral standards and by approving of measures that would conform government more toward righteousness. We do grieve over the rampant indecency, vulgarity, lack of courtesy and respect for others, deceitfulness, self-indulgent materialism, and violence that is corroding society. But in our efforts to support what is good and wholesome, reject what is evil and corrupt, and make a profoundly positive impact on our culture, we must use God's methods and maintain scriptural priorities.

God is not calling us to wage a culture war that would seek to transform our countries into "Christian nations." To devote all, or even most, of our time, energy, money, and strategy to putting a facade of morality on the world or over our governmental and political institutions is to badly misunderstand our roles as Christians in a spiritually lost world.

God has above all else called the church to bring sinful people to salvation through Jesus Christ. Even as the apostle Paul described his mission to unbelievers, so it is the primary task of all Christians to reach out to the lost "to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me [Christ]" (Acts 26:18; cf. Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9). If we do not evangelize the lost and make disciples of new converts, nothing else we do for people—no matter how beneficial it seems—is of any eternal consequence. Whether a person is an atheist or a theist, a criminal or a model citizen, sexually promiscuous and perverse or strictly moral and virtuous, a greedy materialist or a gracious philanthropist—if he does not have a saving relationship to Christ, he is going to hell. It makes no difference if an unsaved person is for or against abortion, a political liberal or a conservative, a prostitute or a police officer, he will spend eternity apart from God unless he repents and believes the gospel.

When the church takes a stance that emphasizes political activism and social moralizing, it always diverts energy and resources away from evangelization. Such an antagonistic position toward the

established secular culture invariably leads believers to feel hostile not only to unsaved government leaders with whom they disagree, but also antagonistic toward the unsaved residents of that culture—neighbors and fellow citizens they ought to love, pray for, and share the gospel with. To me it is unthinkable that we become enemies of the very people we seek to win to Christ, our potential brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Author John Seel pens words that apply in principle to Christians everywhere and summarize well the believer's perspective on political involvement:

A politicized faith not only blurs our priorities, but weakens our loyalties. Our primary citizenship is not on earth but in heaven. ... Though few evangelicals would deny this truth in theory, the language of our spiritual citizenship frequently gets wrapped in the red, white and blue. Rather than acting as resident aliens of a heavenly kingdom, too often we sound [and act] like resident apologists for a Christian America. ... Unless we reject the false reliance on the illusion of Christian America, evangelicalism will continue to distort the gospel and thwart a genuine biblical identity.....

American evangelicalism is now covered by layers and layers of historically shaped attitudes that obscure our original biblical core. (The Evangelical Pulpit [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993], 106-7)

By means of faithful preaching and godly living, believers are to be the conscience of whatever nation they reside in. You can confront the culture not with the political and social activism of man's wisdom, but with the spiritual power of God's Word. Using temporal methods to promote legislative and judicial change, and resorting to external efforts of lobbying and intimidation to achieve some sort of "Christian morality" in society is not our calling—and has no eternal value. Only the gospel rescues sinners from sin, death, and hell.

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