

There is a great deal of confusion in the Christian world today about the role of the government and the individual Christian's relationship to it. What is the Christian's role in the world of politics? What should our emphasis be? Should we demonstrate? Should we actively campaign for laws that legislate morality? And what role does a nation have in going to war? Aren't we to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39)? The Word of God clarifies what our stand should be on these issues.

Commented [notes1]: 39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.
Matt 5:39 (NIV)

In the Old Testament, God dealt with the nation of Israel as a unique people called out to represent God to the world (Exodus 19:6). Their kings were supposed to be God's servants who, with the help of the priests, directed people to live under the laws of God before the eyes of the world. The nation was to exemplify the blessings of living in a right relationship with God. Their societal, moral, and religious laws set them apart as people that were blessed because of their right relationship with God.

Commented [notes2]: you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."
Ex 19:6 (NIV)

When Israel consistently did not live as an example to the world, Israel, as a political entity, was destroyed. There was a shift to the kingdom of God in the hearts of individuals that make up the body of Christ. Note the words of Jesus to Pilate when He was being examined. "... now my kingdom is from another place." John 18:36c (NIV) There is no longer a chosen nation of God that represents God's work in the world. The body of Christ around the world, cross-culturally and trans-nationally represents Jesus to the world (Luke 17:20-21).

Commented [notes3]: 20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." 22 Then he said to his disciples
Luke 17:20-22 (NIV)

Many see America as a Christian nation. Certainly it is a blessed nation, but it is only Christian in the sense that most of its founders and the majority of its citizens claim Christianity as their religion. The very founding of our country appears to be in direct opposition to our text for today. That does not mean that God has not blessed our nation because of the Christian influence. That does not mean that we should abstain from voting for moral principles or even participate in government if we are called to do so. First and foremost, however, is the fact that we are citizens of the kingdom of God (Ephesians 2:19).

Commented [notes4]: 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,
Eph 2:19 (NIV)

Christians are a worldwide and time transcendent group that has a calling that is immeasurably greater than any one government (Revelation 11:15). We are citizens of a timeless kingdom. We are rescuing the drowning souls of men on sea of uncertainty and constant change. We are pulling them out of the frigid waves of sin that threaten to engulf their souls and putting their feet on the solid rock of Christ (Colossians 1:13-14). We are giving them a reason to live and hope for eternity. That reason is not the American flag. It is the cross of Christ.

Commented [notes5]: 15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."
Rev 11:15 (NIV)

I am a patriot, but my allegiance to Jesus Christ makes all my other loyalties pale in comparison (Luke 14:26), I love this country. I value its freedom. There is no place that I'd rather live on the planet. The blessing of God has made this country prosperous, but

Commented [notes6]: 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,
14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
Col 1:13-14 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.
Luke 14:26 (NIV)

this is not the kingdom of God. America is a far cry from the kingdom of God (Revelation 21:4).

Do you recall the vision of Daniel chapter two? Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a man consisting of various metals. Each part of the man represented the nations of man. In the end, a rock came and smote the image of man utterly destroying it, and the rock became a mountain that filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:44). The image represented the governments of man. The rock is Jesus and His kingdom. I didn't read about any little chunk of metal that was separate from the image. America is part of the image, part of the governments of man.

I love this country. It bothers me when people run it down. But much more importantly, I am a believer in the word of God. Biblical Christianity realizes that we serve the God that is King over all kings, Obama, Putin or Kim Jung Un included. We know God turns their hearts in whatever way will bring His will to pass in the earth (Proverbs 21:1). Our focus should be advancing the kingdom of God in the hearts of men across the entire world. We are one with our suffering brothers and sisters in China, North Korea, and Muslim nations. Our battle is not with flesh and blood but against spiritual forces in the heavenly realms (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Our confusion over political issues comes from not understanding the Word of God and not recognizing our role as Christians. To understand the role that God would have us take, let us look first at the apostle Paul. He was the most influential apostle as he wrote a good portion of the New Testament. He ministered during the reign of Nero, one of the craziest and most evil Caesars of Rome. Paul understood that we, as Christians, have one great purpose. **Our purpose is to proclaim Jesus the Messiah, and part of the proclamation is through the witness of our own life transformation** (1 Peter 2:12). He never proposed resisting Rome. He never started a political movement for the recognition of Christianity. He didn't even write derogatory comments about Nero when Nero burned Christians on poles to light up his gardens at night.

Listen to his words from 2 Corinthians. *² I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. ³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.* 2 Corinthians 10:2-5 (NIV) Paul declared that we don't live by the world's standards, nor do we engage in the battles the world engages in. We fight but not with weapons the world recognizes. Our fight is for the eternal souls of men. We fight spiritual forces, arguments against surrendering to Jesus, and thoughts in our own minds and the minds of others, thoughts of selfishness and lust and the pretense that we are some kind of god. Our battle is to

Commented [notes8]: 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Rev 21:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 44 "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. Dan 2:44 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. Prov 21:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 2 Cor 10:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. 1 Peter 2:12 (NIV)

have our own mind and the mind of others obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3). That cause far transcends any political effort.

This is a politically charged time for us in the USA. Our country is totally divided and the rhetoric is ugly and fierce. Our personal opinions are shutting our minds off to hearing anything but what reinforces our mindset. When politics is first in our heart and mind we are focusing on something so inferior to the kingdom of God, something temporal and soon to pass, something far less than what we were meant to do.

Allow me to ask you a heart-examining question. Do you talk as much about the beauty and love of Jesus as you do about politics? Do you focus more on the truth of Scripture than on which candidate will be best for our future? Are you more concerned with the war on terror or the war for men's souls? **The kingdom of God should be so much higher, so much more important to us, so much more urgent to us, than any other thing in life because it is eternal** (Matthew 6:33).

The apostle Paul spent years in Roman jails. He finally had his head lifted from his shoulders by Rome, but he never bothered with Rome. Why not? It was insignificant! The worst thing that happened to the church was when Constantine recognized Christianity and adopted it as the banner to fight under. We went from being persecuted and growing, to accepted and corrupted. Why do you think the Chinese church asks us not to pray for persecution in their country to cease? They don't want to end up as lukewarm as us, who are more concerned about the economy, comfort and politics than the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Do you believe that people are living every day without knowing the real reason to live? Are people dying without Christ? What does that have to do with politics? Nothing! ... unless by me ranting about some political issue I offend a seeker so that they aren't able to hear the good news of Jesus. The Apostle Paul wrote, ***3 We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.*** 2Corinthians 6:3 (NIV) Paul was willing to avoid certain doctrines and subjects and even liberties that he rightfully had so that nothing would get in the way of his audience hearing about the life-giving Savior, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 8:9).

We are Christians before we are Democrats or Republicans. God wants us to pray for our leaders regardless of their affiliation. **He is calling us to be radical Christ proclaimers, by our life and by our words. No other reason holds a candle to that call.** No other need is so urgent (John 4:35). I'm all for laws that preserve God's moral standards. As a church we should encourage Biblical morals. They bring the blessing of God. But laws alone will never change the heart of men. Only the Spirit of the Living God can do that (Titus 3:5-7). We can make moral laws by the boatload. Ancient Israel was great at that, but it didn't change their hearts or keep them from idolatry.

Commented [notes13]: 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.
2 Cor 11:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
Matt 6:33 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.
1 Cor 8:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.
John 4:35 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,
6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,
7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.
Titus 3:5-7 (NIV)

The Apostle Paul is very clear in our passage today and also in **Titus 3:1-2**. God uses the governments of men to punish evil and maintain order. We are to submit to them. We are to pay our taxes. We are to honor those in governmental positions because God put them there, Obama or Clinton or Bush, God puts them in office. And when one of them converts, as was the case with Sergius Paulus, they can be an influence for the kingdom of God while in that office (**Acts 13:7**). That will far outweigh any political decisions they make.

Commented [notes18]: 1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,
2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.
Titus 3:1-2 (NIV)

There is one exception noted in the book of Acts. **If the government asks you to deny your faith, or stop proclaiming the good news of Jesus, then you are to tell them your first allegiance is to your Creator.** You may suffer for that. If you do, the Scriptures promise that you are blessed beyond measure and will share in the glory of Christ Jesus (**Romans 8:17**).

Commented [notes19]: 7 who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.
Acts 13:7 (NIV)

But let us go to a higher authority than Paul. Let us go to the Lord Jesus Himself. Did He ever preach against Rome? He called Herod a fox, but Herod would have taken that as a compliment. Did He tell Zaccheus to give up his work as a tax collector? Apparently not! He just convicted him to be an honest one (**Luke 19:1-10**). Did He tell the centurion that received Him to stop serving Rome? No (**Matthew 8:5-13**)! The accusations against Jesus were political in nature, but they were a lie and Pilate knew it!

Commented [notes20]: 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
Romans 8:17 (NIV)

Rome was going to be the instrument of Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus had seen many of his fellow citizens suffer the horrors of crucifixion, yet He never spoke out against Rome. Instead, Jesus always spoke of a much greater kingdom, the kingdom of God. It is a kingdom that transcends all the kingdoms of this world. He said the kingdom was within us (**Luke 17:21**). It doesn't come in a visible way, like with an army or a revolution. It comes when the heart bows before Jesus and surrenders our demands to be god to the One who alone is God (**Matthew 12:28**).

Commented [notes21]: 8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."
9 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.
10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."
Luke 19:8-10 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would."
And his servant was healed at that very hour.
Matt 8:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: Luke 17:21 (NIV)
²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

When Jesus stood before Pilate, the governor of Judea and representative of Rome, He made it very clear that Pilate could do nothing that God did not allow him to do. ¹¹ *Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.* John 19:11 (NIV) That was consistent with the words of King Nebuchadnezzar who after a severe humbling declared that God does whatever He desires and we cannot question it (**Daniel 4:35**). Do you believe that? **I think part of our desperate efforts to affect politics is from our lack of faith in the Sovereignty of God.** We feel that if our party doesn't win, somehow God will lose control of the situation.

Commented [notes24]: 28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.
Matt 12:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Dan 4:35 (NIV)

Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world, and yet we seem to think Jesus misspoke (**John 18:36**). He knew exactly what He was saying. We are not a threat to governments if we are real Christians. The Crusades were not representative of the gospel of Jesus. God does not call us to band together as believers and kill others in His name. As individuals we should turn the other cheek. Our weapons are love and the

Commented [notes26]: 36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."
John 18:36 (NIV)

Word of God. God may move a nation to exercise His judgment on another nation. That is not our concern, unless you are called by the government to serve in that war. Then, as our passage tells us, we obey. In doing so we seek to influence those serving with us for the kingdom of God (Luke 3:14). The outcome of any war is in the hands of God. We couldn't stop it if we tried. We can certainly speak out against specific sins in war, but the decisions of national leaders are in God's hands. We are to be about our Father's business (Luke 2:49).

Commented [notes27]: 14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay."

Luke 3:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: Luke 2:49 (ESV)
⁴⁹ And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

We look at some of the tragedies committed by world leaders in Sudan and North Korea and ask how it is possible that these monsters could be moving as God allows. I'm sure the recipients of the apostle Paul's letters wondered why they should honor Nero. But then, we only have to look back to the cross to see that what we see as only evil, God can use for immeasurable good (Genesis 50:20). Why would God allow the Chinese and Korean brothers and sisters in Christ today to serve hard labor and be tortured day in and day out? They say it is to train them up by the tens of thousands to go into Muslim countries to proclaim the Gospel, something us soft westerners can't do.

Commented [notes29]: Genesis 50:20 (ESV)
²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

We have to realize that when we start going on about the way it should be, and I'm as guilty as anyone, we are boasting like we had some revelation from God. If you do, that's fine. Otherwise, we ought to humble ourselves and realize that His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways (Isaiah 55:8).

Commented [notes30]: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. Isaiah 55:8 (NIV)

As I wrote this message, I had to repent and ask God to put a bridle on my tongue. I realized it was as much or more for me than anyone. I imagine God laughs as we declare what should happen in Iran or who should be elected. What if we need persecution to wake our nation up? Then would the best thing be to hold off that persecution? How would you or I know unless we had a revelation from God?

Vote for the godliest candidate, for the moral propositions, for what you think is best for others, as far as your understanding goes, but realize that the outcome is in the hands of God. Realize that the worst-case scenario in your mind might be the very best in the eyes of God so that the country finds itself in the depths of despair in order that individuals might come to repentance and find a relationship with Jesus. Isn't that what will matter in eternity? Our only hope is Jesus. The only One that really brings life transformation is Jesus. The only One that can keep His promises is Jesus!

I am trying to conform my life, and hopefully encourage you to conform yours to the word of God, and that's not popular today. If the Scriptures don't convince us, nothing will. The Scriptures are our most powerful tool. They are the weapons of our warfare, a warfare that transcends ages and nations and cultures (Ephesians 6:11-12).

Commented [notes31]: 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Eph 6:11-12 (NIV)

Why does God want us to take this kind of a stand? It's because it is not about the passing governments of man. It is about Jesus, glorious, loving, gracious and merciful Jesus. It is about eternity and the destiny of the souls of men. It is about the cross and

the power of redemption. It is about glorifying God, not man (Jude 1:25). Will you save your passion for Him alone (Galatians 4:18)?

Questions

- 1 Why did God deal uniquely with Israel?
- 2 What changed that and when?
- 3 Where is the believer's primary citizenship?
- 4 What does the Daniel 2 image teach us?
- 5 Why are believers confused about their role regarding political issues?
- 6 Review 2Corinthians 10:2-5.
- 7 Why should our focus be the Kingdom of God?
- 8 How could politics stumble a seeker?
- 9 What is the exception to the rule?
- 10 Why might the worst case scenario be the best thing for us all?

Commented [notes32]: 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.
Jude 1:25 (NIV)

Commented [notes33]: 18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.
Gal 4:18 (NIV)