

### Introduction:

Politically, it has been a red-letter week. No doubt, some are potentially excited about the new healthcare bill, while others believe it would make the founding fathers roll over in their graves. However, the chatter I've heard among Christians over the past week has me increasingly concerned. I certainly don't have a problem with anyone having a political opinion. I don't have a problem, nor do I think does God, with someone voting or being politically active because they believe in a certain cause. What concerns me is Christians who are following the lead of evangelical denominations in believing that this vote is somehow either a defeat or a victory for Christianity and for Jesus. We must not be led by the religious right or the religious left. We must not be led by the political machines that many are turning their churches and Christianity into. We must be led both congregationally and individually by God's word. Sadly, many Christians seem to be following the lead of evangelicals and ecumenicals alike, confusing the Constitution with the Bible and politics with spirituality. I believe it is high time we started getting back to the Bible in our approach to earthly citizenship. With that in mind, we need to see some biblical principles that help us navigate this very interesting time of politics.

### Discussion:

- I. God allows, but does not command, political activity.
  - A. I have to start by making sure I am completely clear. I believe Christians are allowed to have political opinions. I believe Christians are allowed to be politically involved. I believe Christians are allowed to be passionate about political views. I believe Christians are allowed to spend time campaigning, going to rallies, striving to convince others of their political opinions. God has not forbidden political involvement.
  - B. When John the Baptist spoke to Herod, he did not condemn him for political involvement, but for having his brother's wife (**Mark 6:18**). When John preached in **Luke 3:12-14**, he did not tell tax collectors or soldiers that they needed to repent of their governmental involvement. He rather told them to do their jobs based on proper principles. In fact, telling the tax collectors to collect what was authorized and the soldiers to be content with their wages was tacit approval of continuing their occupations.
  - C. In **Acts 24:10-21**, Paul preached before the Roman governor Felix. He did not rebuke him for political involvement but rather stated his political involvement was a reason he was glad to speak to Felix. In **Acts 25**, Paul spoke before the next governor, Festus, and did not rebuke him for political involvement, but rather appealed to Caesar using the political process to protect his life. In **Acts 26**, Paul was glad to present his defense to Herod Agrippa. He did not rebuke Herod for political involvement.
  - D. Finally, both **Romans 13:1** and **1 Peter 2:13-17** demonstrate that the governing authorities are established by God. I can't imagine how we could claim the government is established by God but Christians are not allowed to be part of that government or process.
  - E. When this lesson is finished, I hope you can distinguish the difference between my points about God and politics and the voices of those who claim Christians are not allowed to be part of the political process. I believe that Christians are allowed to be passionate about politics and government in the same way I believe some are passionate about educating children and so became teachers, like Jeanne Parham; in the same way the Liskes are passionate about helping children with autism and have started the Brown Center for Autism; in the same way some are passionate about helping people so they become nurses, like Sara Hicks; in the same way some are passionate about college football so they watch or go to all the Tennessee, Vanderbilt, Alabama or Auburn games (I won't even begin to name names about these). These are things God allows but does not command. Our relationship with God should govern our involvement with them, but they are not part of God's plan for saving souls or spreading the gospel. Sadly, while we recognize being a sports fan, a teacher, a nurse, or an activist for some cause is not part of God's kingdom work, too many of us think our politics and our vote is part of God's kingdom work. It is not.

- II. God never asked us to establish a Christian nation.
  - A. We know that Israel was an actual, civil, political nation. It had a king appointed by God. It had laws written by God. Its judges were to judge based on God's law. Somehow, we, who have been among the staunchest advocates of a distinction between Old and New Covenants, are allowing the Old Covenant to govern our thinking about God's nation than the New Covenant.
  - B. When God established the New Covenant, He did not establish an earthly nation. In fact, He shook the earthly nation out of the way (**Hebrews 12:26-29**) so that we could be part of a heavenly kingdom that cannot be shaken. God did not intend Rome to be the new Israel. Had He intended that, He could certainly have directed the Christians in how to accomplish that. He did not intend the Holy Roman Empire to be His kingdom. He did not intend England to be the new Israel. He does not intend the United States of America to be a new Israel. In **John 18:36**, Jesus made it very clear. His kingdom is not of this world. If it were, His citizens would fight to protect Him. That is, they would use political and governmental means to defend their king and establish their nation. But His kingdom is not of this world, so they don't do that.
  - C. According to **I Peter 2:9**, we are a holy nation. But that is not because we are Americans. That is because we are Christians, bought by the blood of Jesus. Our citizenship is in heaven (**Philippians 3:20**). God has bought a heavenly nation with the blood of Jesus. We need to remember that Jesus did not die to make America a Christian nation. He did not die so a nation could have Christian laws. He did not die so Christians would run countries. He died so the lost could be saved. The saved make up His nation.
  
- III. God has never asked us to spread the gospel through political means.
  - A. Listening to the chatter online, you would think every page of the Bible taught that God wants us to make sure our President and congress pass laws that uphold biblical morals. I would like to issue you a challenge. Please find one verse that says that? It seems that some time ago, the evangelical mainstream and the liberal ecumenicals decided God's plan found in the Bible needed our political help. They've turned church buildings into town halls, congregations into political platforms, legislative battles into spiritual wars. Sadly, Christians are falling in lockstep behind them.
  - B. Does God want people to obey Him? Certainly. Does God want the borders of His kingdom spread throughout the world? Absolutely. But not once does He ask us to do that through political means—not once. Our vote, our president, our nation's laws are not part of God's plan to save souls by Jesus Christ. God has never asked us to spread the gospel through political means.
  - C. He has asked us to teach people the gospel. **Matthew 28:19-20** does not ask us to make all nations Christian. It asks us to make people disciples in all nations. **Mark 16:15-16** does not ask us to go into all the world and campaign for Christian laws. It asks us to go into the entire world and preach the gospel. **Romans 10:15** does not say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who run nations in a Christian way." It does not say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who vote a certain way." It says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" Paul did not tell Timothy to preserve the Christian legacy by pursuing political ends in **II Timothy 2:2**. Rather, he told him to teach others who would faithfully teach others. In **II Peter 1:12-15**, Peter did not claim he would remind Christians of God's will or preserve God's law by enacting empirical legislation, but through the teaching and writing of God's word.
  - D. Feel free to have political opinions. Feel free to vote your conscience. Certainly, your relationship with God should govern anything you do, including any political involvement you have. But do not confuse political work with God's kingdom work. He hasn't asked us to spread His soul-saving gospel message through political means.
  
- IV. The Constitution is not the Bible, Part 2.
  - A. I've heard a lot this week about our God-given rights. This is spoken in context of our nation's "Declaration of Independence" and the Constitution. According to the Declaration, we have been endowed by our Creator with the unalienable rights of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The Founding Fathers could not get the Constitution ratified without the addition of the Bill of

Rights, which, among other things, protects our rights to practice religion as we want, have free speech, bear arms, have speedy and fair trials, and to avoid cruel and unusual punishments or excessive bails. These “rights” are government given, not God-given. Find one Bible verse that says any of us actually have any of these rights?

- B. One of the greatest debates of our nation is how to interpret these national documents and what it means to defend these national documents against those who would misuse them. Brothers and sisters, I love our national documents. I believe they are important in governing our nation. However, we need to understand these documents were not divine. They were not divinely inspired. They do not enumerate God given rights. The Bible is God’s book. You can read the Bible from front to back and not learn one single thing about how the Constitution of the United States should be read or interpreted, or even if it is the document that should be used to govern any nation.
  - C. Some will claim that **Romans 13:1** demonstrates that our government is from God and therefore what it says is from God and should be preserved in that way. But that is a very myopic view. That passage actually says that every governing authority is from God. That means Nero’s government, Hitler’s government, Stalin’s government, and Castro’s government were all from God as well. Could they claim that their laws were established by divine providence and should, therefore, be protected? Of course not. Paul’s point in **Romans 13:1** is not that every government that actually has power is God’s form of government or that their laws, rights, or responsibilities are the right ones that must be protected and defended by Christians as part of their service to God. Paul’s point is that we should submit to whatever government we are under.
  - D. The fact is, we could totally dispense with the Constitution, establish a completely different form of government, change the way the whole thing works and God would not care. God has not divinely given us our Constitution. I like the Constitution. I have opinions about how it should be read so our country will be like what the Founding Fathers envisioned. We can debate that if you wish, but we will not be having a spiritual debate that God remotely cares about. We need to quit acting like when we are arguing about the Constitution we are arguing about God’s will. We aren’t.
- V. God only expressed one political opinion in the New Testament.
- A. There are myriads of political issues on the table these days: taxes, immigration, healthcare, marriage, homosexuality, abortion, homeland security, defense, trade, the environment, etc. We may have opinions on what is the best way to run our country in all these areas. However, God has not one single time expressed a political opinion on any one of these issues. Further, He has not one single time expressed that we should have spiritual concern about the political climate in any of these areas. In fact, to my knowledge, God has only expressed concern for one political issue in the entire New Testament.
  - B. **I Timothy 2:1-2** says, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” Rome was not a godly government. Homosexuality was commonplace. Abortion was frequent. Idolatry was rampant. Emperor worship was common. Of all the things God could have told the Christians to be worried about, up in arms about, politically active over, and even praying about, the only thing He picked was that the government would allow Christians to live the life God wanted them to. Further, the only thing God asked them to do was pray about it.
  - C. Christians today get bent out of shape about voting because of all kinds of issues. We need to understand this, there is not a single law that has been passed by our governments that were a victory for Christ and His kingdom or a defeat. The weapons of our warfare are not physical, they are not political, they are not governmental; they are spiritual (**II Corinthians 10:3-7**). The fact that abortion is legal, while personally sad to me, is not a defeat for Christ or His kingdom. We could campaign, vote, and be politically active until we are blue in the face and finally get abortion outlawed, but who would be saved by that? Not one person. Sadly, Christians have bought Satan’s lie that if we get abortion outlawed we will have accomplished some major victory for Christ. That is simply not true. If you want victories for Christ, get the gospel to another

person who may be impacted by it and decide not to have an abortion no matter what the law says.

- D. Think about it this way. Is it a victory for Christ's kingdom that murder and stealing are outlawed in our nation? No. I'm thankful these things are illegal. But we haven't done our job on murder and theft because it is illegal. We still have to get the gospel message to people so that they will surrender to God for His sake, not simply for the sake of man's laws.

VI. God expects us to unite around principles greater than politics.

- A. I'm often amazed at the conglomeration of people Jesus pooled together as His apostles. But I'm never more surprised than when I think about bringing together Matthew the tax collector (**Matthew 9:9; 10:3**) and Simon the Zealot (**Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13**). A tax collector was practically a Roman collaborator, sympathetic with the Romans. A Zealot was someone for ousting the Romans, even willing to get involved in insurrection. I wonder what kind of political discussions those two men had.
- B. What is interesting to me is there is no indication that becoming Jesus' disciples meant they changed their political views about Roman occupation. Matthew didn't have to become a Zealot and Simon didn't have to become a Roman sympathizer. Rather, they learned to unite around something that was far more important than politics. They learned that far more important than one's outlook on the Roman occupation of Judea was looking to Jesus as everyone's Savior.
- C. Becoming a Christian doesn't mean putting aside your political views to go to a different party. Being a Christian doesn't mean being a Republican or a Democrat or one of the third parties. The fact is, being a Christian doesn't mean you have to believe in democracy over socialism. Someone can politically and economically believe in socialism and still be a great servant of God. Not a single one of the apostles were believers in democracy. Yet, they made pretty good Christians.
- D. Being a Christian means uniting around Jesus Christ, which is greater than any political party or principle. I think Satan is having a hey-day. He is happy to get us to divide in any way he can. We get a democracy, which gives us political parties and ever since people who believe in Jesus have been arguing with each other and accusing each other of not really being Christians because of a political view. The fact is, God doesn't care what college you went to or like. A Christian can root for Tennessee, Vanderbilt, Alabama, or Auburn. But Satan is happy to get us to divide over that and think less of each other because of it. God doesn't care what kind of car you drive. A Christian can drive Ford, Chevy, Nissan, Toyota, or Honda. A Christian can drive American made or foreign manufactured cars. But Satan is happy to divide us over things like this and cause us to think less of each other. God doesn't care what kind of computer you use. Christians can be PCs or Macs. But Satan is happy to get us to divide or think less of each other over this. In the same way, I don't think God cares what political party you are. A Christian can be a Republican, Democrat, Socialist, Libertarian, Constitutionalist or whatever party is out there. But Satan is happy to get us to divide over politics or to think less of each other because of it.
- E. Jesus didn't die to change our politics. Jesus died to save our souls. He died to provide a uniting force that is greater than our politics. Let's get politics off our spiritual tables. Let's quit assuming Christians have to agree with us politically. Let's quit worrying if they disagree. If you want to talk politics, that's fine. If you disagree, that's fine. But when that discussion is over, don't walk away saying, "How can that person be a Christian if they disagree with me politically?" Christianity is not about dividing over politics, it's about uniting around Christ, who, by the way, was not a political figure.

**Conclusion:**

We've all got different opinions about the political climate of the day. That's okay. We've all got different degrees of concern about political matters. That's okay. What is not okay is to think our political opinions are somehow part of our work in God's kingdom. What is not okay is to think that what is going on in Washington is a victory or a defeat for Jesus' cause. What is not okay is to think we have done God's will by voting instead of talking to people about Jesus. What is not okay is to equate American ideals with God's will. We are a chosen nation because we are in Christ, not because we are in Amer-

ica. Our greatest citizenship is in heaven and no political maneuvering is going to change that. America is not God's nation. We don't have to protect it in order to protect God's people. The Constitution is not God's document. We don't have to protect it to protect God's will. We must make sure above all to remember why Jesus died. He did not die to make people Republicans or Democrats. He did not die to make sure nations followed capitalism or socialism. He did not die to make people Americans. He died to save all souls, whether American, European, Russian, or Arab. He did not die to get people into a political party. He died to redeem all people whether Republicans, Democrats, Socialists, or Libertarians. He did not die to make sure healthcare was privatized or nationalized. He died to make sure our souls were cared for.

May we always remember why Jesus died and what is our responsibility because of his death.