

Engaging the Politics of this World

God Is In Politics

As we look at the Kingdom of God from a political perspective, how the politics of this world relate to kingdom preparation becomes a natural question. [1] Many Christians have disengaged from politics in this world, considering it to be irrelevant, unrelated, or just not spiritual enough for “good Christians” to be bothered with. But Chapter 13 of Romans makes it quite clear that the political systems of this world are instituted by God and should represent His values.

(Romans 13:1-4 KJV)

1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

First we should eliminate any notion that when evil men gain political power we should just submit and consider it the will of God. That is not what this passage is saying. That view only takes verses one and two into consideration and fails to put them in the context of verses three and four. God may certainly use non-Christian people in places of civil government but the context shows that their purpose is still intended to be ministers “...of God to thee for good.” When civil authorities fail to fulfill their God-ordained purpose, which is to reward good and punish evil, but instead reward evil and punish good, that ruler or government has become illegitimate. [2]

A Christian Republic

The founding fathers of the United States of America understood this principle and concluded that the King of England was not a minister of God and declared themselves and the colonies independent. In the opening comments of the Declaration of Independence, they cited God three times and declared that the laws of nature and nature’s God entitled them to a separate and equal political position. They boldly stated that it was the Creator, and His natural laws (which should be obvious to all) that give all people the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

For civil government to be legitimate it must be under the laws of nature and nature’s God. Understanding this concept, the founders went about to establish a new government that would better reflect His values. They established a republic having its laws based on the

scriptures. Below are just a few quotes that reflect the Christian values held and promoted by the founders.

“The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were the general principles of Christianity. I will avow that I then believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God.”¹

— John Adams

“Sensible of the importance of Christian piety and virtue to the order and happiness of a state, I cannot but earnestly commend to you every measure for their support and encouragement.”²

— John Hancock

“I verily believe Christianity is necessary to the support of civil society. One of the beautiful boasts of our municipal jurisprudence is that Christianity is a part of the Common Law. . . There never has been a period in which the Common Law did not recognize Christianity as laying its foundations.”³

— Joseph Story

“...our citizens should early understand that the genuine source of correct republican principles is the Bible, particularly the New Testament, or the Christian religion.”⁴

— Noah Webster

Some argue that the United States was founded as a secular democracy, but that is simply not true. There is an overwhelming body of historical evidence to show that the United States was founded as a Christian republic. The very framework of the United States Government, with its three branches, comes from Isaiah where it says “...the LORD is our Judge, The LORD is our Lawgiver, The LORD is our King...” (Isa 33:22 NASB). [3]

The Philosophy and Purpose of Government

As historian David Barton points out in many of his lectures, the Declaration of Independence gives us the philosophy and the purpose of government. After a brief opening paragraph, it only takes 38 words to make 3 points which define this philosophy and purpose.

...that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men...

Philosophy of Government:

- a) There is a God;
- b) Certain rights, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness come from God.

Purpose of Government:

- c) The purpose of government is to secure these rights.[4]

These 38 words are prefaced by a phrase that also contain a powerful statement: “ We hold these truths to be self-evident...” As my friend and former congressman from Ohio Bob McEwen says, “...that is just a fancy Elizabethan way of saying, ‘Any idiot ought to understand this!’” Surely

the authors of this phrase had Romans 1:20 in mind which says of God, "...His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made..."

The Stewardship Model

A point to be made in this chapter is that the politics of this world can be and should be utilized as one of the vehicles we use to prepare the way for the appearing of God's Kingdom. Political involvement should, in some way, be integrated into every Christian's belief system and practice. To show this, let's look again at the parable of stewardship found in Luke, Chapter 19 and Matthew Chapter 25. We will use excerpts from both.

Luke 19:11-14 (KJV)

11 And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.

12 He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.

13 And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.

14 But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.

Again, Jesus was approaching Jerusalem and the disciples thought Jesus was going there to assume the throne of Israel—not to be crucified. This parable was designed to help Jesus' disciples (and us) understand the timing and preparation relating to the appearing of the Kingdom of God. It also gives us an overview of events from His ascension to the time of His second coming to give us a framework upon which to build our understanding of the future. [5]

Why Jesus Left

The first point to notice here is the purpose for the nobleman's journey—to receive a kingdom. In another place, Jesus spoke directly, not in a parable, about leaving to make preparations. He said:

John 14:2-3 (KJV)

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

Many have interpreted this passage to mean that the place He is preparing is in heaven not on earth, but that is not what it says. In fact, the context of this verse states, "...I will come again and receive you..." it does not say, "I will come again and receive you and take you away." This indicates that the preparation He speaks of is indeed on earth and fits with what we read in the parable of stewardship.

The idea that Jesus is in heaven preparing a place for us on earth is not difficult to grasp. Any Christian who has an elementary grasp of Christian doctrine knows that Jesus is working with us now, even though He is bodily absent. Just before His ascension Jesus said to His disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. And they went out and

preached everywhere, the Lord working *with them...*” (Mark 16:15, 20). He is conducting the preparations through the Holy Spirit whom He sent in His name to live in us. Jesus’ work of preparation and ours are one and the same. [6]

The Nature of Preparation Work

Next we see in this parable that certain citizens of the country hated the nobleman and protested his rule. But this raises a question. If the nobleman was away on a long journey, why did his citizens feel the need to protest his rule? I believe the answer lies in the activities of the nobleman’s servants, whom he had instructed to carry out his business.

The context shows that this nobleman ruled over certain people—citizens. This is a kind of civil government. Even though he was away on a journey, his servants continued to enforce this government according to their master’s laws. This is probably what caused the citizens to protest the nobleman’s rule. [7] This portion of Jesus’ parable sounds similar to today. When we seek to apply Christian values in the political arena, screams of protest come from those who hate Jesus and do not want Him to rule over them! But as we read above, the early Christians went out and “preached everywhere” and everywhere includes the political arena.

Therefore, the nature of preparation is not separate from the secular world. Our work is intended to confront the culture with Christian values and principles. [8] We should remember that Jesus was seen by the Romans and the ruling Jews, not as a religious figure only, but as a political figure who threatened their status. He was and is a threat to the political systems of this world. Therefore, we should not be surprised when our Christianity meets political resistance.

The Result of Good Stewardship

The next thing we see in this parable is the nobleman’s return. This portion of the parable carries a strong political tone in that it shows the faithful servants being given authority over cities in the coming Kingdom.

(Luke 19:15-19 KJV)

15 And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

16 Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.

17 And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.

18 And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds.

19 And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.

How shall we qualify for positions in the Government of God (a great thing) if we do not show good stewardship in the government of men (a little thing)? How shall we prepare the way for the Kingdom and be qualified to rule with Christ if we are not willing to apply God’s principles to the politics of this world? Matthew’s version of this parable puts it this way:

Matthew 25:21 (KJV)

His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a

few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

There are many areas other than politics where we can prove ourselves to be good stewards of what has been given to us. But the system of government that we have inherited in the United States is definitely one—and one of the most important. The republic that we call the United States of America was patterned after biblical concepts and we have been given stewardship of it. Good stewardship of this government will be rewarded in the Kingdom government when it appears. [9]

The Result of Poor Stewardship

The final point to be made in this chapter from the parable of stewardship concerns the servant who hid the resources entrusted to him in the ground and made no effort to increase.

(Luke 19:20-26 KJV)

20 And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:

21 For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.

22 And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow:

23 Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?

24 And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds.

25 (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.)

26 For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.

The attitude of this wicked servant was rooted in his mischaracterization of his master, who he viewed as a hard man. This was a servant who did not serve. Seeing no profit for himself, he saw no purpose in trying, thinking that it would all be for nothing when the Lord returned.

In some cases, refusing to engage the politics of this world and doing nothing to bring the principles of Christ to bear in that area, could be compared to this servant who hid his portion in the ground. If we see God as being hard or harsh, having only judgment in store, or if we think bringing Christian principles to the politics of this world has no purpose or application in the age to come, we may not invest the political resources God has placed in us. Matthew's version of the parable adds a sobering element to the judgment awaiting those who see no purpose in investing the Lord's resources. Not only do they lose what they have, but they are cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. [10]

Matthew 25:29-30 (KJV)

29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

As we see in the parable of stewardship, there are varying levels of success in our stewardship in this world which will please God. If the wicked servant had not buried his talent, but had simply put it in the trust of others who could have increased it, that would have been counted as good stewardship. In the context of this chapter, this might be compared to simply being informed on where candidates stand and giving them our vote—which is entrusting them to represent us and our values. Others might get more involved and still others might even run for elected office. Regardless of how we are involved, we will give an account to God for our effort, our faithfulness, our fruitfulness, and we will be rewarded accordingly.

Political Success?

Christians who work in the political process with the goal of seeing godly government, freedom, etc, often ask this question: “Will we succeed?” We must first realize that we don’t see every detail of how things will play out. Even if things do not go as we might hope, we have not failed. But regardless of how the battle goes, we will win the war. Even if things collapse and the nation succumbs to a totalitarian anti-Christ system, we simply continue the fight. We do not give up or hide our resources in the ground.

It is essential that we understand our goal. Our ultimate goal is not to maintain a comfortable lifestyle that we may have grown accustomed to. Whether the economy, the government or the nation as a whole stands or fails, our goal remains the same. Our ultimate goal, whether working in the politics of this world or some other area, is to be good stewards of God’s resources. As good stewards, we are building a righteous leadership grid which can influence civil governments in this age and be the government of the age to come. When the work of stewardship takes us into the political arena, we must remain focused on the fact that we are Christians doing Christian work to bring glory to God. If not, it is very easy to end up conforming to the existing political template where we may have some success, but accomplish nothing of eternal significance.

While we keep the ultimate goal in mind, there are many ways we can exercise good stewardship. Let’s take just one politically charged issue as an example—abortion. Since abortion was legalized by an activist court in 1973, there have been many battles over legislation that would stop or limit abortion. These battles continue. We would like to see legislation passed to overturn the 1973 decision, make abortion illegal and save the lives of millions of babies. However, we simply haven’t had enough votes to elect good representation in Congress to get it done on a national scale. Nevertheless, we have had some success in limiting abortions. On the issue of abortion alone, we will all stand before God and give an account of our political stewardship. Who will be able to say they did not know?

Proverbs 24:11-12 (KJV)

11 If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain;
12 If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?

Three Reasons to Engage Civil Government

In summary here are three reasons why Christians should be involved in the politics of

this world:

- a. It is the responsible thing to do. Civil government in this world is an institution ordained by God which has been committed to men (see Romans 13:1-2). We are commanded to be salt and light in this world, good stewards of the treasures we hold.
- b. Good government is God's will. Faithful application of God's principles in civil government brings a taste of heaven's government to earth, allowing citizens under such a government to experience a quiet and peaceable life (see 1 Tim 2:2). We should expect this. Romans Chapter 13 tells us the purpose of civil government instituted by God is to punish evil and reward righteousness (Rom 13:3-4). When government officials abandon their responsibility to represent God in their office, they need to be replaced.
- c. It is a training ground. Engaging the struggle to bring about good civil government is good character training. It is easy to hide our talents of knowledge and leadership in the ground and avoid the troubles and conflicts that come when we apply godly principles to civil government. But the one who presses in and perseveres develops character, proves faithfulness, and qualifies for rewards in the government of God to be revealed. [11]

Paradigm Builder:

We should eliminate any notion that when evil men gain political power we should just submit and consider it the will of God. The politics of this world can be and should be utilized as one of the vehicles we use to prepare the way for the appearing of God's Kingdom.

Before reading this chapter, how would you describe your position regarding this concept?

1 Strongly Disagree - 2 Disagree - 3 Neutral/Unsure - 4 Agree - 5 Strongly Agree

How would you describe your position regarding this concept after reading this chapter?

1 Strongly Disagree - 2 Disagree - 3 Neutral/Unsure - 4 Agree - 5 Strongly Agree

1 The Works of John Adams, by his grandson, Charles Francis Adams, 1856; page 45. John Adams, signer of the Declaration of Independence, judge, diplomat and second president of the United States

2 Independent Chronicle (Boston), November 2, 1780, last page; see also Abram English Brown, John Hancock, His Book (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1898), p. 269. John Hancock was a signer of the Declaration of Independence; President of Congress; Revolutionary General; Governor of Massachusetts.

3 Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States, p. 593 Joseph Story was a U. S. Congressman, Harvard Law School Professor, and a Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court appointed by President James Madison

4 Early American History, Noah Webster, p. xviii; 1841; from google books. Noah Webster is known as the godfather of American education, a master of 28 languages, author of many text books and the first American Dictionary of the English Language.

The Kingdom Paradigm, Common Sense Theology for Politically Minded Christians
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