



Should Believers Be Involved In Politics?

Selected Passages

TO: LEGISLATORS

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This week we arrive at the study of the fourth wrong view of Church and State: The idea that believers should only be involved in evangelism and not politics. The short of it, if every believer adhered to this popular Evangelical teaching, there would be no believers in office. There would be no salt and light influence represented in our representative form of government. I used to give credence to this camp. But that began to change some years ago when I personally witnessed the leading advocate of this position rally his congregation to come out for a city hall meeting wherein that night the City Council would decide if or not his Christian college would be granted a land use permit to construct a memorial chapel in his name. This glaring incongruity collided with my growing realization that I could not minister to believers in the California Capitol if deep down I thought they were out of step with God's will. I realize both of these are pragmatic arguments, nonetheless those experiences opened me up to thinking through the other side of this debate and to study the Word with a lessened predisposition. Today I come down on the side that believers are to be involved in transforming culture versus being against it, or isolated from it. What follows are the biblical arguments for participation in the State in ways exceeding evangelism.

INTRODUCTION

The fact that believers should affect the world in which they live (versus isolate themselves from it) is evident from the Sermon on the Mount. Note Matthew 5:13-16:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men."¹⁴

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;¹⁵ nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house."¹⁶ "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

When Jesus lights a **lamp**—when He brings an individual to true saving faith in Himself—what results is a person who will **give light**¹ to all who are in the house. **House** (v.15) is another way of expressing two previously-used words in the passage. This simply means a believer will affect people on the **earth** (v. 13a), people in the **world** (v. 14a). Accordingly, this passage teaches that it is normative for believers to affect the physical **earth/world** or “land” in which they live. Now add this:

Verses 13-16 come after verses 1-15! Contextually, the above-quoted passages follow The Beatitudes: Those concise virtues (listed by Jesus in the opening portion of His Sermon on the Mount) that are emblematic of His mature followers; i.e. character qualities such as gentleness (5:5), righteousness (5:6, 10), mercifulness (5:7), purity (5:8), etc. Per the flow of the passage, one's manifestations of **salt** and **light** (similitude's expressing the idea that believers will be preservers and illuminators in the **earth/world**) will be in direct proportion to the degree these characteristics inhabit the individual. Over the long run, one cannot affect their surroundings in a godly way unless they first possess godly character.

**WHO ONE IS
AND HOW ONE AFFECTS THEIR WORLD
ARE INTRINSICALLY INTERTWINED**

Now add to the above this: Such an interpretation of the meaning of this passage is supported by the following grammatical understandings. First, the twice-used verbs at the beginning of verses 13 and 14 are **You are** *humeis*

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Should Believers Be Involved In Politics?

Selected Passages

este. These verbs are present active *indicatives* in the Greek language. They are not imperative verbs, or put another way, commands from Jesus. This is a subtle but important distinction. It means one is Christ-influencing in culture (agents of the preservation of truth and the illumination of truth) to the degree one is mature in the Savior. Jesus is not saying, “Be salt and light!” Rather He is teaching that to the degree one internally manifests Christ-likeness is the degree to which one will externally affect culture, or in the case of a legislator, the capitol community, its people and its laws.

Why is this so important? Because the solution as to why some Christians are disengaged from the political arena is in view here: It is inappropriate to slug fellow believers over the head with this passage, as if Jesus were saying “Be salt and light!” (While most likely inwardly thinking, “Because you have your head in the sand!”) He is not speaking in the imperative at this point. Rather what this passage teaches is this: One should encourage the weaker brother or sister to grow to maturity in Christ because one is really not as spiritually mature as they think if they are not in some way preserving or illuminating society! **You are automatically if you are beatitudinal!** Always *indicative* of maturity in Christ are manifold and various acts of preservation and illumination of God’s truth, or **good works** in one’s **world**. There is no way around this plain meaning of the text. Such is the cadence of this passage.

Secondly, notice in the original language, the beginning of verse 16. The adverb at the start of the passage further evidences the idea of Jesus’ sequential thinking relative to what He has previously delineated. **Let** *outws* means “in this way” or “as follows.” I.e. one’s **light** is to **shine**— and the verb **shine** *lampatw* is an imperative— “in this way.” All put together, Jesus herein commands believers to evangelize in this way: He is saying, “In this way your light must shine!” It is very tight in the Greek: *Outws lampatw!* Here is “in this way” summarized graphically:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Spiritual Maturation | (Mt. 5:1-12) |
| ↓ | |
| Cultural Participation | (Mt. 5:13-15) |
| ↓ | |
| Other’s Evangelization | (Mt. 5:16) |

Personal spiritual transformation and maturation will be *indicated* by one’s cultural participation which then provides a platform for *imperative* evangelization (v. 16). Summarily of the introduction, to those who say, “The believer should only be about evangelism in the political arena” this passage evidences their omission of a vital step: There always needs to be some kind of cultural participation wherein a person manifests the beatitudes of Christ in order for there to be effective evangelization.

CAN ANY EVANGELIST BE EFFECTIVE WHO SHUNS CONNECTING TO ANOTHER’S WORLD?²

Therein is the eventual result of an “all evangelism no politics” point of view.³ This passage lends correction. Both biblically and practically one cannot eliminate the second point of Matthew 5:1-16 and expect to be an effective soul winner in the political arena. The “all evangelism” point of view is facetious because you can’t have one without the other.

I. WRONG VIEW #4: DO EVANGELISM, NOT POLITICS

As if that were not enough, what follows are eight additional biblically-supported reasons for political involvement by believers.

A. THIS VIEW POSSESSES TOO NARROW AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE MISSION OF JESUS

In the Great Commission passage of Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus commands His followers to teach others more than just the truths of the Gospel (as primary and important as that is to the mission of Jesus). He teaches believers to go way beyond evangelism and **make disciples**. How is the believer to do that? By **...teaching [others] to observe all that I commanded you** (emphasis mine). Paul echoes the necessary breadth of instruction above and beyond the truths of the Gospel when he said to the Ephesian Elders, “I did not shrink from declaring to you the *whole* purpose of God (Acts 20:27). Paul said regarding *all* of his biblical writings, “The things that I am writing you are a *command* of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). Peter said regarding his “more than salvation teachings”: “You should remember...the *commandments* of the Lord



Should Believers Be Involved In Politics?

Selected Passages

and Savior spoken by your Apostles” (2 Peter 3:2). Accordingly, Jesus wants others to know *all* of His instruction. That means He wants His followers to learn about Marriage, Family, Church, Commerce *and* Government. Such is *required* to **make disciples** (which is the main *command* of the Great Commission). Conclusively, Jesus’ mission is more than evangelism, granted evangelism is the primacy of His mission.

So what does Jesus teach—what is the whole counsel of God—regarding Government? Among other things this: He Himself created it (Gen. 1:26; Col. 1:16), He ordained it (Rom. 13:1) and He sustains it (Col. 1:17) in order to moralize a fallen world (Rom. 13:4). Why? In addition to His saving grace, Jesus’ purposes, compelled by a heart of compassion for the lost (Mt. 9:36), earnestly desires to manifest common grace and restraining grace to all creation (cf. Mt.5:45b). How great is His love!

The aforementioned descriptors and supporting passages clearly reveal that Jesus has a purpose for the institution of Government that is in addition to evangelism. Accordingly when one of the leading advocates for the “All evangelism, no politics” viewpoint states,

[Jesus] did not come to earth to make the old creation moral through social and governmental reform but to make new creatures (His people) holy through the saving power of the gospel and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.⁴

I must respectfully disagree. Herein illustrated is too narrow an understanding of the mission of Jesus! As primary as the role of evangelism by the believer in Government must always be, the aforementioned broader understanding of Jesus’ teachings regarding the institution is in keeping with the Great Commission: “To observe *all* that I commanded you.” Herein is the “whole counsel of God” regarding Government.

In a parallel and expansive sense, to say that Jesus’ overall purpose and mission was solely about salvation is to imply that Jesus possesses no instruction about marriage, family, church or commerce either.

Another error of this same influential Christian author, John MacArthur Jr., is his tendency to spiritualize away

the importance of good civil government relative to the propagation of the Gospel. He states:

The ideal human government can ultimately do nothing to advance God’s kingdom, and the worst, most despotic worldly government in the end cannot halt the power of the Holy Spirit or the spread of God’s Word.⁵

In an ultimate sense and in view of the grandeur and sovereignty of God what is said here is true. But the altruistic tone of this statement postulates not a viable argument for non-governmental involvement by believers. One does not have to be much of a student of current geopolitics, world history, or historic missions to know that Middle Eastern countries, North Korea, Cuba and Russia among others, have suppressed the growth of the Body of Christ to a much greater degree than non-suppressive countries. How many missionaries have come forth relative to the cause of Christ from the aforementioned lands? Practically speaking why have 90% of world missions in the past century been funded by America?

Good government is therefore important to achieve and maintain if for no other reason than the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The present and historic impetus for much of the fulfillment of the Great Commission stems from countries that honor freedom. That means the believer’s role in sustaining a country’s health and well-being is a noble and important task and is certainly in keeping with **all that Jesus commanded** us.

To illustrate one of many possible results from living by too narrow an understanding of the mission of Jesus, radio preachers must now edit their radio broadcasts in Canada so as to not include any mention of Romans 1. This is due to new Canadian laws influenced not by Christians. What will become of the great radio ministries in America that have so affected our culture for good and evangelized the lost⁶ if the laws, unaffected by Christian influence also begin to change here? Governments do facilitate or else hinder the advance of God’s kingdom. In light of **all that Jesus commanded** us, should not believers be involved in government if only for the sake of the Great Commission? Yes! Church leaders should



Should Believers Be Involved In Politics?

Selected Passages

applaud, respect, support, sustain, prepare and elect more Christian political leaders to work hard (amongst other things) to preserve the preachers' freedoms to propagate the Gospel. Such governmental involvement is in keeping with **all that Jesus commanded!**

CHRISTIAN LEGISLATORS I KNOW VIEW THEMSELVES IN A PARTNERSHIP WITH PASTORS.

SHOULD NOT PASTORS VIEW THEMSELVES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CHRISTIAN LEGISLATORS?

Should the Church raise up young men and women to run for office with the same enthusiasm that it places on raising-up godly pastors, wives, husbands, children and businessmen? Absolutely yes!

B. THE MISSION OF JESUS INCLUDES A TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY

If **teaching them to observe *all* that I commanded you** is the overall purpose for Christ coming to earth,⁷ as previously seen (the Gospel ministry being a vital part of that [cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-6] and the starting point to **making disciples**) then the mission of Jesus has an eye toward and includes the transformation of marriages, families, businesses and governments. In sum total the mission of Jesus has a sum total intent on transforming societies, or as they are called in the Great Commission passage, **nations** *ethnos*. The Great Commission passage is plain: Believers are to effect **nations!** Those who advocate too narrow a view of Jesus' mission are forced to interpret *ethnos* to mean "people groups" so as to comport the passage to their viewpoint of non-government involvement. But, for those who hold a bigger view of Jesus' mission, individual evangelism is inescapable, but so is affecting **nations** for good.

C. WHICH PARTS OF THE BIBLE SHOULD THE CHURCH NOT PREACH ABOUT?

It follows from the previous point that the pastor or believer who holds to a "Do evangelism not politics" limited understanding of Jesus' mission must decide what portions of the Bible he or she should teach from. Does one omit teaching from Genesis 9:5-6, John 19:11, Acts

25:11, Romans 13:1-7 or 1 Peter 2:13-14 since they have to do with believers impacting Government? Does one avoid teaching about Joseph's influence on Pharaoh's government, or Daniels' on Nebuchadnezzar's government? By way of extension, if one "just preaches the Gospel" should one avoid teaching on Marriage and Family? What parts of the whole counsel of God should the Bible teacher omit? Foisting too narrow an understanding of the mission of Jesus leads to editing out Scripture—and huge ensuing incongruities in light of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Acts 20:27.

D. GOD LEAVES CHRISTIANS HERE ON EARTH BOTH TO DO EVANGELISM AND TO DO GOOD FOR OTHERS

After one is saved (God tends to leave His saints on earth after He saves them) what is the believer to do? Should he or she only evangelize others the remainder of their earthly life? What about Matthew 22:39, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself?" This is a command from Jesus too! Should one show love to his or her neighbor by protecting their home from thieves while they are gone? What about loving them via making sure the law punishes thieves? What about working to create and enforce laws pertaining to the privacy of a neighbor's internet so that child predators cannot exploit their children or hackers steal their credit card information? How about loving a neighbor by making sure the educators of their children will not teach them unbiblical views? Galatians 6:10 states to believers, "So then, while we have opportunity, let us *do good* to all people, and especially those who are of the household of faith." Ephesians 2:10 further sites societal responsibility, when it says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for *good works*, which God prepared beforehand that we would walk in them" (emphasis mine).

"WHY SHOULD CHURCHES TEACH THEIR PEOPLE HOW TO DO "GOOD WORKS" IN HOSPITALS AND IN SCHOOLS, AND IN BUSINESSES AND IN NEIGHBORHOODS, BUT NOT IN GOVERNMENT?"⁸

It is not an obtuse argument to connect loving one's neighbor with the stemming biblical implication that the believer be involved in Civil Government.



Should Believers Be Involved In Politics?

Selected Passages

E. GOD ESTABLISHED BOTH THE CHURCH AND THE STATE TO RESTRAIN EVIL

When a believer or the Church win someone to Christ such internal regeneration should quell evil in the heart of the convert (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). However history and present observation indicate that not everyone comes to Christ, nor are those who do completely and immediately sanctified in their manifest actions. Accordingly God has instituted in addition to the Church, Civil Government to restrain evil by the use of force and punishment in a fallen world. Romans 13:4 (speaking of Government) is clear about this wherein Paul states, "...but if you do what is evil be afraid, for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on one who practices evil." 1 Peter 2:13-14 states similarly, "Submit yourselves...to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers..." God mediates His reign by vesting His authority in and through Government (Rom. 13:1) in order to restrain evil in a fallen world. Such a realization necessitates the believer's involvement in government since Government is part of Jesus' mission.

One other point here is worth mention. Christian isolationists often harbor ideological superiority: As if the authority of the Church is over the authority of the State. The Church is not over the State; conversely the Church too needs to submit to the State. The glaring historical and embarrassing American illustration of this is the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. The abolition of slavery came not from the Institution of the Church via evangelism. It was the State that birthed one's freedom from another's ownership. Sometimes the State restrains evil more effectively than the Church!

It stands to reason therefore that believers should respect the unique role of the State and be involved in Government lest they end up inheriting a lawless country.

F. CHRISTIANS HAVE INFLUENCED THE STATE POSITIVELY THROUGHOUT HISTORY

There are at least three categories of historical influence of believers on the State. These accounts are numerous

and well documented by authors Schmidt¹⁰ and Colson¹¹ in their wonderful respective works. Here is a summary:

1. The Dignity of Mankind

The historic spread of Christian influence on the State has been responsible for many victories: Its influence outlawed infanticide, child abandonment and abortion in the Roman Empire (374); it prohibited the burning alive of widows in India (1829); it ended slavery in the British Empire (1840); it stopped the binding of women's feet in China (1912); and it outlawed racial discrimination in America. These are but a few of the historic contributions of Christians engaged in politics.

2. The Constitutions of Mankind

Christians were influential in the writing of the Magna Carta in England in 1215, the Declaration of Independence in America in 1776, and the Constitution of the United State in 1787. These are the most important documents in the history of governments known to mankind. All were significantly influenced by believers and are the bases, not only of prosperous countries, but the ensuing Christian mission movement worldwide. These advanced views of government have birthed individual freedoms, justice, freedom of religion and the separation of Church and State.

3. The Education of Mankind

Believers have greatly influenced the development of higher education in America.

**OF THE 182 COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
IN AMERICA IN 1932, 92% HAD BEEN
FOUNDED BY CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS**

Such influence has led to the advancement of a society theretofore unknown in world history, a society that has accelerated the Great Commission to levels of accomplishment equal to that of the first century Church.

These are but a few illustrations of Christian influence on the State. Therefore when MacArthur reasons in 2000, "God does not call the church to influence the culture by promoting legislation and court rulings that advance a



Should Believers Be Involved In Politics?

Selected Passages

scriptural point of view” and “Using temporal methods to promote legislative and judicial change...is not our calling—and has no eternal value”¹² one wonders how he can arrive at such a narrow understanding of the mission of Jesus? In his much-earlier commentary on Matthew 5:13-16, (1985) he said, “...Christians can have a powerful influence on the welfare of the world.”¹³ And therein he quotes Martyn Lloyd-Jones who said, “[What saved England was that]...The political situation was affected, and the great Acts of Parliament which were passed in the last century were mostly due to the fact that there were such large numbers of individual Christians found in the land.”¹⁴ Unfortunately the year 2000 MacArthur has influenced thousands of pastors to avoid governmental involvement. History, as well as the contextual argument of Matthew 5:1-16 (presented in the introductory section) favors the year 1985 position.

G. DOESN'T THE BIBLE SAY THAT PERSECUTION IS COMING?

When studying eschatology, the doctrine of future biblical events, one could reason “Since things are going to get worse in the end times (cf. Matt. 24:9-12; 21-22; 2 Tim. 3:1-5) why should anyone attempt to improve government today? The answer is simple: In the meantime the believer is commanded to “love your neighbor” (Mt. 22:39), “do good works” (Ep. 2:10) and manifest “salt and light” (Mt. 5:13-15) in addition to evangelizing the lost (Mt. 5:16). One cannot disobey the clear commands of God in lieu of end-time passages.

THE FATALISTIC FUTURE OF THE WORLD PROVIDES NO EXCUSE FOR SOCIETAL LETHARGY IN THE PRESENT

To underscore: Scripture explicitly mentions that no one knows the exact time of His Second Coming (Mt. 24:36; 25:13), therefore the believer should influence government for good as long as he or she is able.

H. WILL POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT DISTRACT BELIEVERS FROM THE MAIN TASK OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL?

The question isn't whether or not political involvement by the Church will divert energy away from preaching the

Gospel, if indeed God has called the believer to be salt and light as a predicate for evangelism, which He has.

SUMMARY

For these reasons the “Do evangelism, not politics” understanding of the Christian life is wrong. Believers should be involved in politics. What follows in our outline next week is the inverse: Wrong View #5:

V. Do Politics, Not Evangelism

In that no noteworthy believers hold to this position today, (all leading Evangelical thinkers believe the body of Christ should do evangelism in government) I will not spend any time on it. Stay tuned for the right view.

¹ This is also a present active *indicative* verb.

² In 1 Corinthians 9:22b the Apostle Paul states, “I have become all things to all men so that I may by all means save some.” This is an appropriate supporting passage relative to this scriptural understanding of cultural involvement. Paul was willing to get involved in the lives, professions (including the political arena, e.g. Phil. 1:13, conf. 4:22; cf. Acts 26:8ff.) and cultures of others without compromising biblical truth in order to evangelize the lost. How can today's Church evangelize politicians if it is unwilling to connect with politicians?

³ Put another way, this is illustrative of the “Christ against culture” versus the “Christ transforms culture” worldview which today divides many believers.

⁴ MacArthur, John *Why Government Can't Save You: An Alternative to Political Activism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) p 11-12. It is worth noting MacArthur's exposition of Romans 13:1-7 in 1994 wherein he states respective of ordination and moralization: “Human government is ordained by God for the benefit of society...In order to promote and protect the good in society human government must punish the evil.” (MacArthur, John *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 9-16* [Chicago: Moody, 1994] p 218, 225) Implicit in his comments are his seeming admission to a broader role of the mission of Jesus (cf. Col. 1:16). Unfortunately his later thinking (“Do evangelism, not politics”) has influenced many.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 7

⁶ Many leading Christian thinkers believe one of the major reasons America has not gone the way of Europe is due to the presence and power of Christian radio.

⁷ Said another way, did Christ come to save or make disciples? The Great Commission, Matthew 28:19-20 indicates the later. Christ did not end His ministry commanding His followers to evangelize, but rather to make disciples.

⁸ Grudem, Wayne *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) p 48. Note I am utilizing Dr. Grudem's book outline in these studies with permission.



Should Believers Be Involved In Politics?

Selected Passages

⁹ The one exception to obedience to the authority of the State is when civil authority would necessitate disobedience to God's Word (cf. Exo. 1:17; Dan. 3:16-18; 6:7, 10; Acts 4:19).

¹⁰ Schmidt, Alvin *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004)

¹¹ Colson, Charles *God and Government: An Insider's View on the Boundaries between Faith and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). Previously published as *Kingdoms in Conflict*

¹² *Ibid.*, p 130; 15

¹³ MacArthur, John *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985) p 243

¹⁴ Lloyd-Jones, Martyn *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 1:157 (as quoted in MacArthur, John *Why Government Can't Save You: An Alternative to Political Activism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000)