

Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?
(Isaiah 2:22)

Deuteronomy 28

Settling for Less

(or, “So -Who Are You Endorsing for President?”)

The short answer to that question is, Jesus. I know that seems rather flippant to say, and some people reading this will likely roll their eyes and say, *Oh, brother – simplistic answer for the complex issues facing this nation, knee-jerk response, etc.*

But in that seemingly simple answer, I am indeed addressing some complex matters. The first of these is that, under the laws that govern the actions of tax-free entities (such as this ministry), we cannot legally endorse political candidates. There are, of course, ways of getting around those laws that ministers often utilize, such as the old *Speaking only as a private citizen, and not as the head of this church/ministry, I intend to vote for _____.*

However, I am not going to utilize that avenue either, which brings me to the second complex matter (and the first area where the church has gotten off the tracks) I hope my short answer will address. To put it simply, *we would not endorse a candidate, even if we legally could.* The church has acquired a bad habit over the years, in that it believes that political power will further its goal of discipling all nations – *this nation, in particular.*

As I write this, the Texas primary is upon us and, for once, the candidates have not been decided by the time the show comes to town. Things have changed in the years since I first started to notice political campaigns. It used to be that the church was a constant in all things of life, reminding us that God ultimately is in control of everything, and where America’s true strength lies. Politicians – even the ones who were not necessarily believers – knew that most Americans *were*, to the point that belief was regarded as... well, sacred. You didn’t attempt to twist the Bible to suit your particular philosophy or political dogma, your dogma had to measure up to the Bible. If you had besetting sins that you had a hard time shaking (or were not inclined to shake), you kept them quiet. You just *didn’t* mess around with the things of God if you wanted to stay in that career for very long.

Today, much of the church has fallen for the “McDonald’s mentality” of trying to pack bigger and bigger churches, which leads to a larger take in the collection plate and the emphasis of pleasing the crowd instead of trying to please God. The result of this is that you see the Body of Christ, whose head is supposed to be the Lord Jesus Himself, suffering from a kind of dual personality as it splits along conservative/liberal lines, each with its own part of the Word of God adherents seem to have difficulty paying attention to. The church no longer wants to hear its Lord say, *Well done, good and faithful*

servant, but to hear the “other guys” say, *Uncle! You win; you’re right, I’m wrong*. The church would rather be “right” than be His.

One result of this is a greater emphasis on the church trying to get (or tap into) political power, in the belief that by electing the “right people” to office that it will make the church’s job of being the Lord Jesus’ witnesses and discipling this nation easier. Judges appointed that will be less inclined to listen to the arguments of those who want the Gospel silenced. Lawmakers that will be more inclined to repeal regulations that are directly contrary to the Word of God. Is there anything wrong with believers getting politically involved? Absolutely not. If you believe that God gave us our system of participatory government, Christians need to – indeed, *must* – participate in order to be “salt and light” in the process.

The problem occurs when we come to depend on the process rather than our Lord. Deuteronomy 28 relates the blessings promised by God for ancient Israel if the nation followed the Lord, and the curses if she did not. This is part of a theme related countless times in the Bible; *God trumps human abilities*. As Israel herself would later discover, both to her advantage and her detriment, the mightiest armies on Earth are no match for Earth’s creator.

With that in mind, permit me to offer a few perspectives on nations and the Word:

1. **A nation’s chief defense is her relationship to God.** By the time of Solomon’s reign, Israel had become a regional power, built largely on the conquests of his father, King David, who God described as a man after His own heart. Within a few generations, that empire would be reduced in size, then finally destroyed as the nation went through recurring apostasy, turning from God and serving the Baals. In fact, God permitted enemies to rise up against her, and even called Babylon His own instrument to punish His wayward people. (The Book of Isaiah has many references to God’s pleas to Israel to turn away from her sins.) Bob Dylan wrote in his song, *When He Returns*, “The iron hand, it ain’t no match for the iron rod. The strongest wall will crumble and fall to a mighty God.” And we have seen this happen in our own lives with other countries and regimes. (How many pieces is the Berlin Wall in today?) And yet many of us not only sin openly, but actually flaunt it. We are proud of it. Dare we think that we are somehow immune from this principle? That we can turn away from God and go our own way with impunity? We still have *In God We Trust* on our money, which we use to buy drugs or pornography, give to the enemies of God or even just to buy a bunch of stuff we don’t need. Do we think we will be treated any differently simply because God let us develop the atomic bomb or put our flag on the moon? And yet, the Lord promises to be the shield and the rear guard for those that love Him, as Israel’s “heroic generation” that entered the Promised Land found out. Smaller in size, yet God went before the people to drive out larger and stronger neighbors. As Joshua pointed out, “their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us.”

(Numbers 14:9) When a nation is right with God, God is that nation's strength – not tanks, not planes, not high-tech gear or nuclear weapons, but God Himself.

2. **All you get from a quest for political power is... political power.** It must be acknowledged, once and for all, that political power is limited in its applications. It is one of several tools available to human beings to govern themselves, to correct problems or to improve the quality of life. In the years since World War II ended, many problems have been corrected or at least neutralized, and the quality of life has definitely improved; I'm writing this on my laptop computer, a very modern device that I have come to rely quite heavily on, both in this ministry and in my "day job" as a teacher. But we still have problems, many of which are caused by poor attitudes, bad decisions on our part and other things *that government cannot address and will never be able to*. Evil and the sin nature are something that cannot be addressed through legislation, but must be overcome by the application of the Blood of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Why would the church settle for a human construct, limited in its capabilities, when it can access the Almighty, eternal, omniscient God who can move heaven and earth to bring His Will about, and Who knows just how to handle any given situation?
3. **You can't "keep all that junk to yourself."** The argument is made nowadays that faith is a private matter, something you do behind closed doors that doesn't (or shouldn't) affect public life. Ironically, this is often made by people who don't think twice about flaunting their *un-Godly* behavior in parades or rallies, yet expect believers to keep quiet about it all. And when we try to point out that said behavior (or, as He refers to it, "sin") separates us from God and keeps us from spending eternity with Him, we are instantly accused of being intolerant or hateful – when the truth is, if we *really* hated such people, we'd let them go on their merry way straight to Hell. I have lived through two presidents who listened to the voice of their "inner demons" instead of (in Lincoln's words) "the better angels of our nature," to this nation's detriment. Don't try to tell *me* that character doesn't matter, or that what is on the inside of a person doesn't come out once that person acquires power in any form or to any degree... I know better. All that "junk" makes us what we are, and *will* be experienced by those around us, for better or worse. In his song, *Creed*, the late Rich Mullins wrote "I believe what I believe is what makes me what I am, I did not make it; no, it is making me." You may persuade (or coerce) a person not to proselytize, but their beliefs will come out for all to see, one way or another.
4. **No Party – or Candidate – Is A Perfect Fit.** Since God ultimately is in control of all things, leaders come through His permissive Will. Sometimes, they come as a result of His direct intervention, but for the most part they come through the processes in place within that

nation.(And you'll often find His Hand working directly in the process.) And the process by which said leaders come through His permissive Will is distinctly human – fallible and flawed. More often than not, a person goes into the voting booth holding their nose; they may not be perfectly happy with the choice he or she is about to make, but they know the *other* choice is going to be even worse. Selecting “the lesser of two evils” often is the best one can hope for. This is not to say one shouldn't work within the party and the system to try and make things better. (Remember – “salt and light.”) But until most if not all the party members are under the same convictions and operate from the point of being saved, sanctified and filled with the Holy Spirit, there will be differences that you just have to put up with. And that brings me to, perhaps, the most important point of all...

5. **Our First Allegiance is to The Lord Jesus.** *We* are the ones given our marching orders under the Great Commission, remember? He is the Standard that dogmas, parties, movements and entire systems of government must live up to. And should the choice come down to your affiliations/relationships/country or your God, it must be God every time, because He *is* God. This is not to say that God cannot bend the affiliations/relationships/country to suit His Will (He certainly did with the Roman Empire, even after all the persecutions of believers under various emperors), but even if He chooses not to for whatever reason, He must come first. Don't get me wrong; I am an American, and consider myself blessed to be one. I do not subscribe to the philosophy of those who see the United States only as a problem, and the source of all the world's miseries. But I will spend eternity in the Kingdom of the One who makes nations, Who has done more for me than my country will ever be able to do. I serve Him because He has bought my soul back from death with the precious blood of His Son. I serve Him because He calls me, and because I wish to please Him. And if that means pointing out to my country (which He also made) where it has gone away from Him and urge it to turn back to Him, so be it.

“Seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, and all these things will be added to you,” Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Working within the political system is fine, but limited; there's only so much you can do through political means. We must continue to be salt and light in this world and all of its ways. But always remember – first things first. Stay with the Commission, and I think you will find that God will take care of the rest as we take care of the things He longs for the most.