

*Show me Your ways, O LORD, teach me Your paths; guide me in
Your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior, and my
hope is in You all day long.*

Psalm 25:4, 5

A Double-Edged Sword

Recently, a number of churches decided to challenge Internal Revenue Service regulations for tax-exempt entities by discussing the moral qualifications of candidates for the Presidency of the United States. The Alliance Defense Fund, which has been a defender of free speech issues for believers, has offered to represent churches and pastors who may be targeted for prosecution by the government for participating in what the ADF calls Pulpit Freedom Sunday, a protest of IRS regulations prohibiting intervening or participating in a political election.

The reason for the action taken is explained in a Sept. 25 ADF press release:

Churches were completely free to preach about candidates from the day that the Constitution was ratified in 1788 until 1954. That's when the unconstitutional rule known as the "Johnson Amendment" was enacted... Churches are exempt from taxation under the principle that there is no surer way to destroy religion than to begin taxing it. As the U.S. Supreme Court has noted, the power to tax involves the power to destroy. The real effect of the Johnson Amendment is that pastors are muzzled for fear of investigation by the IRS.

The goals of the ADF are laudable, and it is right for the fund to work for sustaining the First Amendment rights of pastors and preachers in this nation, and I certainly pray for their success. But I cannot help but be concerned for the consequences of their struggle – partly if the ADF loses this fight, but also if they win.

There are far too many pastors and churches in this nation that, to paraphrase the Prophet Isaiah (Refer to Isaiah 29:13, quoted by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 15:8), honor God with their lips but whose hearts are far from Him. They pray and acknowledge God readily enough as part of their job, but act as if He has no power at all or just walked away from His creation and that we as people are pretty much on our own. Such people tend to see political power as the most effective way to correct inequalities, reinforce cultural standards and enforce the laws of this nation that are (as a matter of fact) based upon the principles found in the Word of God. Such people will work tirelessly for candidates or a political party, thinking that if we just elect the "right people" to office, all this nation's ills may not be completely erased but can be severely curtailed. (The Lord should only get that same level of effort from such people.)

To be sure, it is necessary for believers to engage in the political process as we are called to be "salt and light" in the culture of this nation. If

you believe that we as Americans have a participatory democratic republic by the Grace of God, then it must be acknowledged that we will be called to account by God for what we do with it. How did you vote? What were your motives? How did you arrive at the decision to vote for this person or on this issue? Did you put some thought and prayer into it, or did you just give a quick look and make a selection? Did you stand on principle or were you swayed by more fleshly concerns? But at the same time, there is a curious Orwellian “doublethink” quality to believing in God yet at the same time acting as if He cannot (or will not) do anything to bring about His kingdom on Earth; that it is up to us to bring the Kingdom here by our own efforts. We cannot; we have tried again and again through various means, and our efforts always fall short or end up making us look foolish with the Divinity of the Lord Jesus always called into question.

The success of the ADF’s efforts in this matter will have the effect of placing a double-edged sword into the hands of pastors and ministers across this nation – which is fine, if they know Who they belong to and are willing to seek Him for guidance on when and where to use it. The potential problem becomes when you have pastors and ministers who have fantasies of being players on the political scene. By turning to political solutions to the problems of this country, they can get “face time” on television or, perhaps, be the “power behind the throne” once their candidate is elected. (And, as a nice little side benefit, their egos get stroked.) Or perhaps, coming out of seminaries that teach that God is still around but is just not “into” miracles anymore, said ministers sincerely believe that this is the way to proceed if the work of His Kingdom is to be advanced. The ability to endorse candidates from the pulpit wielded by such pastors and ministers will bring the focus of the congregation to said candidate and not to God, where their attention truly belongs.

The truth of the matter is, God still does miracles. My wife and I have seen them far too often to believe otherwise. God still cares about His people, and is moving mightily in their lives, as seen even as you read this in many places around the world (refer to last month’s message, *See This Video!*) God wants the best for us, and will give it to us if we would just give up trying to run the show ourselves and turn to Him. Political power is a poor imitation of the glory and majesty of the power of God; it is a human response and, as a result, is limited in its capabilities. I cannot, for the life of me, understand why ministers would turn to such a feeble source when they are members of the Body of Christ Himself – and, as such, have full access to the Almighty, omnipotent, omnipresent God of the Universe and all things beyond.

Don’t get me wrong; I pray the ADF succeeds in its quest to free pastors from these regulations. But I will also pray that pastors will turn to God for wisdom in how to handle their new freedoms.

For the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ
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