

# Should Christians get into politics?

by Denver Cheddie

1 Timothy 1:1-4

1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,

2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Christians could be guided by 1 Timothy 1 regarding political involvement. Based on those verses, Christians have two primary interests:

1) the desire to see all be saved,

2) quiet and peaceable lives where we can practice our faith without interference.

The main weapon at our disposal is prayer. This is foundational to Christians. Anything else is peripheral. So it leaves it totally open whether Christians should get involved in politics, but it is a mistake to think we can accomplish anything for Christ via political office.

## Levels of Political Involvement

Now there are various levels of what can be considered political involvement. There are indirect means of involvement such as voting, or voicing opinions on political issues. Then there are more direct levels of involvement such as running for office or lobbying with politicians for favors. In this article when I speak of political involvement, I am

referring to direct involvement. It is given that Christians should vote and hold political opinions, but do we need a Christian president?

## Schools of Thought on Political Involvement

There are basically three schools of thoughts on the involvement of Christians in politics.

- 1) On one extreme, **Sectarianism** urges believers to isolate themselves completely from the political process. Don't even vote.
- 2) On the other extreme, **Christendom** teaches that the church should seek to influence society for Christ from a position of political power.
- 3) The **balanced position** states that Christians individually may be involved in politics but the church as a body should abstain. This is my view.

## Postmillennial Theology

At the heart of the Christendom school is a postmillennial theology. Postmillennialism believes that the church will affect society in a Christian way and bring about large scale religious reform. Then when the earth has been Christianized, Jesus will return to establish his kingdom. I don't agree with postmillennialism because it is naively optimistic. Seriously look around you. The world is getting worse. Postmillennialism entails a "spiritual" interpretation of the OT while neglecting the explicit teachings of the NT which presage societal decadence in the last days (e.g. 2 Timothy 3:1). Only Jesus' future physical presence combined with the binding of Satan could bring about an elysian society.

Some Christians believe that society is in its current state primarily because Christians have been complacent. They are wrong. The people

were this way even when Jesus and his apostles walked the earth in great power and anointing. Society is falling apart because it was prophesied to be so.

It is also wrong to presume that if our political leaders are "righteous" then that righteousness would be transferred to the populace. King Josiah was a righteous man, yet Jeremiah lambasted the people of his time for their wicked ways (1 Kings 22; Jeremiah 1:2). Josiah's righteousness hardly influenced the people (including his own children) in a positive way. Society is in a downward spiral, because of the mystery of iniquity at work, which no political leader can reverse. Actually the only leader who will have any success before Christ's second coming at bringing some measure of sanity to society will be the antichrist, and that would only be superficial and short lived.

## **A Christian Nation?**

Another premise of Christendom is that nations can be Christianized. There really is no such thing as a Christian nation. Christianity is an individual issue not a national one. There are Islamic states where everyone is coerced to be Moslem. However there cannot similarly be Christian states since individuals must freely choose Christ. Some believe that America is a Christian nation because it was founded on Christian principles. Or should it be said that America was founded on religious, ethical and moral principles? What are Christian principles? The ten commandments? The ten commandments are not even unique to Christianity. They are Judaic. The only principle that is uniquely Christian is the atonement of Christ and its ramifications. All religions basically teach good social values. These are not necessarily Christian

principles. Was America founded on the belief that Jesus is the only Way, the Truth and the Life, and that there is salvation in no other name? Then what makes it a Christian nation?

The real purpose of the church is to evangelize individuals not Christianize nations. One writer asks rhetorically, *“how can we implement God’s Word and demonstrate love for the poor if we do not get involved in politics? How do we take care of the poor, the widows, the orphans, without getting involved in politics?”*

**Maybe we could get involved in an evangelizing church.** Early believers accomplished all these things outside the political arena. This is what James calls pure religion (James 1:27). The truth is that if we can’t do this outside of politics, it is naïve to think we will do it if we get into office. The real problem is not lack of political power, but the absence of pure religion.

## **Lessons From History**

I believe that the church as a body should not pursue political power. History militates against it. For its first 300 years, the church had no political involvement, until the conversion of Constantine. What history has taught is that the church as a political body does not exert a Christian influence on society, it is society that leavens the church. There is a tendency for man to try to institutionalize Christianity, but radical faith in Jesus can never be institutionalized. If society is to accept the church as a political body, we would have to dilute our message i.e. to preach a gospel of nominal adherence. True Christianity is politically incorrect and antithetical to the spirit of the world. The church cannot enter politics without losing its impetus and eternal focus.

Another writer pointed out that William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftsbury were Christians who were instrumental in the abolishing of slavery and the correcting of child labor abuses respectively. I applaud these men. But let it be remembered that Paul also lived in an age of slavery, yet never campaigned against it. Not for one minute endorsing slavery, I believe that individual Christians may rally against social injustices, but the church must not lose its focus. There are social aspects of Christianity that are concomitant with missions e.g. the building of schools, orphanages, clinics etc. Thus it is quite possible for the church to make a social impact outside of politics.

## **How Should We Be Involved?**

As individuals, Christians are free to enter politics. There are numerous references in Proverbs to righteous and wicked rulers. Of course Proverbs defines righteousness in terms of social justice and equity, not personal right standing with God through Jesus Christ. So it is very possible for non-Christians to rule righteously according to the definition of Proverbs. There is a difference between being non-Christian and being anti-Christian.

The most important issue for Christians should be the right to practice our faith without interference from the government. Christianity is politically incorrect by definition, and there is a strong temptation for those who do not understand it to mistake its message as discriminatory (especially against LGBT persons). The ideal scenario is where we can practice our faith and live peacefully (1 Timothy 2:2). So what Christians should really pray for is leaders who will preserve that freedom. We are not necessarily interested in Christian leaders. We just don't want leaders who are anti-Christian.

Concern is expressed that if Christians are not involved in politics, our right to evangelize may not be guaranteed. That is a fair concern. Of course it cannot be assumed that by having Christians in politics, that right will be preserved. What we can assume and what the Bible clearly teaches is that if we wish to have that right preserved we should pray for those in government (1 Tim. 2:1-2). And if that right is taken away, preach the gospel anyway, in season and out.

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