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Excerpt from
WHAT PAUL MIGHT SAY TODAY
Critiques in the Practical Theology of 21st Century Western Christendom

Introduction

A malignant false theology is running rampant within Western Christendom. It is not so much a systematic as it is a practical theology, which, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, has crept in amongst us, mingling freely within the apostate flocks as well as flocks that otherwise are theologically sound. Sadly, this false theology is promoted by many Christian leaders. Because it is their job to guard the flock from such errors, this is perhaps the most distressing of all blemishes in modern Western Christendom.

Without doubt there are many readers of this work who are bold, proud practitioners of this ideology. No doubt their participation is done with good intentions, and is perceived to be a Christian duty, a vehicle by which the Church diligently promotes righteousness.

But this popular movement is contrary to the teachings and practices of Jesus, the Apostles, the Old Testament and the New. Ostensibly it advances righteousness, but in truth it promotes a lie of Satan and effectively neglects a fundamental doctrine of Scripture—the doctrine of total depravity which is explicitly taught in many passages.

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one (Ps. 14:2-3).

What then is this erroneous practice of which I speak? It is nothing less than institutionalized socio-political activism on

the part of the Church. This widespread, ever-increasing agenda within Western Christendom is the product of passion and distorted truths. Far from being an innocuous or simply futile activity, it is counterproductive to our Lord's commission—abrogating, even sabotaging the mission of evangelism. May this short treatise serve as a strong warning to those who are leading their flocks astray.

Without discussing specific socio-political ideals, and before expounding upon the discord this activism strikes with the reality of total depravity, let us consider the objectives set forth for both the Church and the world's governments. Each was instituted by God. Each has a different purpose.

The Role of the Church in This Present Age

Once we allow ourselves to step back from any emotional attachment to our current socio-political state of affairs (be they national or global), we are free to analyze the issues objectively. As the fog of pathos saturating the atmosphere about us begins to lift, our vision becomes clearer allowing us to look back to the time of Christ, to recall and understand the significance of the assignment he gave his disciples.

All power in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. You, then, are to go and make disciples of all the nations and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to observe all that I have commanded

you and, remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20, Phillips).

Five significant concepts immediately stand out in this passage: (1) Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth; (2) disciples are to make converts worldwide; (3) disciples are to teach theology to the converts; (4) Jesus will be with the disciples; and (5) the age will come to an end.

In times past, God dealt with mankind in various manners such as direct verbal contact, prophets, covenants, etc. In the future, God will deal with mankind in other ways: angels will proclaim His glory to the four corners of the earth, evangelists with the seal of God upon them will proclaim Jesus to the world, two prophets of old will walk among the people performing miracles, and finally, Jesus himself will reign as King of Kings. But today, in this age, God's primary dealings with mankind are His dealings with the Church—the calling and sanctifying of the elect.

This is not to say that God is utterly disinterested in nonbelievers and the state of their world affairs. It is to say that His purpose in this current age is the gathering of the elect—the converts (both Jew and Gentile) who complete the Church, the bride of Christ. As such, as clearly stated in the Great Commission, the occupation of Jesus' disciples is a twofold mission: to make converts worldwide and to minister to those who convert. By this God is glorified and His objective for this present age is fulfilled.

Both themes, evangelism and the instruction of the saints, are repeated several times in the New Testament. The task of evangelism is accomplished by proclamation and testimony, as Peter said, "*Proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*" (1 Pet. 2:9). With the

proclamation aspect we have no trouble. Having the knack for spotting those opportunities that allow us to express and debate our particular point of view on any number of issues seems to be a Western trait. Indeed, this book is a prime example. But proclaiming Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, is one thing; being a living testimony is another. Thus, we are to make converts by our actions as well. To do this Jesus explained, "*You are the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:14-16).

Once converts are made, we are to teach them sound, biblical theology. Paul spoke to this, explaining that various gifted leaders have been provided to instruct the elect. God has given apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors, and teachers:

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (Eph. 4:12-14).

Paul's charge goes far beyond the mere delivery of a naïve motivational Sunday morning sermon, as energetic and full of enthusiasm as it may be. An hour of *I'm so happy songs, and a peppy speaker telling us God loves us and wants us to succeed in life, that He has given us the power to overcome; now go out there and be happy!* is not what Paul had in mind.

He instructed Timothy to teach sound doctrine, sound theology, to give his listeners the knowledge necessary to fight

the spiritual battles they will encounter. He reminded Timothy that in the last days some shall depart from the faith, teaching false doctrines and lies and making various legalistic demands on the people. For this the brethren must be prepared:

Nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, . . . These things command and teach. . . . Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Meditate upon these things; give yourself wholly to them; that your profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto yourself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this you shall both save yourself, and them that hear thee. (1 Tim. 4:6-16).

Herein then is the mission of the Church: to make converts worldwide and to teach them sound theology. Adherence to these duties has eternal consequence. The Church, the body of elect, is assembled; and the eternal rewards for every believer are defined by their personal efforts to execute this mission to the capacity, and with the gifts, they have been given.

The Role of Government in this Present World

There are four things to understand about the world's governments. God has ordained them. They are serving His purpose. He has their destiny in store. And finally, although He has ultimate authority over them, He has currently granted control to Satan (Gen. 11; Ps. 2; Eph 1.9-11; Lk. 4:5-7).

It is worth paying special attention to this fourth item. Although Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth, he is not exercising this power at this time. Currently the world is Satan's domain; he is even called the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). As we recall, he offered the kingdoms

of the world to Jesus. Not being omniscient, Satan did not know for certain if Jesus—veiled in his humanity—was indeed the Messiah. Therefore, knowing man's lust for money and power, immediately after Jesus' baptism Satan put him to the test with the old ploy of selling one's soul to the devil. Of course Jesus refused:

Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, All this authority I will give you, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if you will worship before me, all will be yours (LK. 4:5-7).

Years earlier Satan had tried to kill the baby Jesus. The word was out that the Messiah had been born; again, not being omniscient, Satan did not know who this babe was, so he inspired King Herod to search for him. Unable to find the child, he eventually murdered all the babies and toddlers in Bethlehem, up to two years old in his attempt to murder the Messiah who, one day, would strip him of his kingdom (Matt. 1:7-16).

The point of referencing the birth and temptation of Christ is twofold: (1) to show that presently Satan has been handed authority over the kingdoms of the world and (2) to show that although Jesus has the ultimate authority over the world, he is not exercising it at this time. Upon His return, He will most definitely exercise His power; for then He will reign as King of the earth. But at present, this does not suit his objective.

The False Commission

Many have perverted or simply disregarded what we generally refer to as the Great Commission, having replaced it

with a mission more to their particular liking—a temporal mission of social reengineering, seeking immediate, tangible rewards. Various Christian organizations, theologians, and multitudes of pastors (the very persons set in place to protect the flock from such false teachings) propagate these ostensibly righteous missions; but these missions are very different from those which the Lord commanded.

No doubt the reader is familiar with some, or, perhaps all of the many forms in which certain errant leaders have endeavored to place ambitious goals of social reformation on the Church. But many readers will be surprised to learn that these seemingly righteous goals do not align with God's purpose for the Church or with the commission with which He charged it. That being said, it is not the purpose of the Church to convert the world, to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, to institute godly governments within Satan's domain, to embark on world-improvement programs or to implement social reformation.

None of these reformation objectives is the mission of the Church. Furthermore, each cuts absolutely contrarily to the authentic, two-fold mission of the Church. Yet, for many Christians, these misplaced ambitions have become the focal point of their faith. The result is a misguided Christian community, pursuing various unattainable, temporal, pseudo-missions, which effectively displace the real mission—the Great Commission—and subtly work against it.

Each of these reformation objectives is but a clever ploy of our enemy. In the game of chess we refer to this tactic as deflection: a maneuver, employing either sacrifice or attack, designed to draw the opponent's piece away from attacking or defending an important square. Here, our enemy tempts us to chase these bogus,

temporal objectives that we might be drawn away from the critical, eternal point of concern: the Great Commission, evangelism and theological instruction for each believer.

Try as we might, no one, no movement, no religion, no government will, or can, achieve any of these socio-political objectives. The world will be converted, the kingdom of God will be established on earth, righteousness will reign, social conditions will be rectified, and the world will improve; but all of these will take place upon Christ's return.

Upon Christ's return in power and glory he will strip Satan of his current domain and claim it for himself. In the meantime, any effort to reform the world, Satan's domain, is an unrealistic and unattainable goal. The rulers of the world, for the most part, follow a different god. To them the Gospel, as well as the power to overcome evil (which salvation brings to the believer), is hidden. As Paul said:

If our Gospel is veiled, the veil must be in the minds of those who are spiritually dying. The spirit of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, and prevents the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, the image of God, from shining on them (2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Phillips).

Among these various missions of societal reformation, for the last few decades American Christianity has largely been consumed with seeking to establish a godly administration in Washington, one that promises to legislate morality. Whole movements have been launched in this regard. The ideals are preached from pulpits, discussed in Sunday schools, posted on websites, circulated in trade papers, and written about in books. Many churches and seminaries seem to put more energy into achieving this goal than into evangelism and discipleship; indeed, many

have come to view this as evangelism and discipleship.

But, on several levels, it is a great mistake for the Church, as an institution, to be actively and overtly involved in socio-political reform. Aside from displacing the Great Commission it makes for strange bed fellows. Politicians are as fickle as teenagers struggling with peer pressure. It is not wise for the Church to be yoked with them in any fashion (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Too many Christians in America confuse the personal freedoms granted by the Bill of Rights with their spiritual freedom obtained at rebirth. The two are not equivalent. They should not, they must not, be held with equal esteem. The first is a temporal issue of little consequence in the overall scheme of things; the second has enormous eternal import. A pursuit of the first does not fulfill the expectations or obligations of the second.

When the advancement of socio-political issues becomes the focus, the Church is necessarily yoked with others of like mind in such issues, and some will be more insidious, more dangerous than politicians. Inevitably, in this quest for socio-political reformation, the Church will be yoked with heretics. It will stand side by side with pseudo-Christians, teachers of false theologies that deny the very power of the faith: the deity and resurrection of our Lord.

If establishing a godly government was our mission we would have received instructions for the same. Jesus would have addressed it. At least one of the Apostles would have addressed it. But Jesus did not. The Apostles did not. The fact of the matter is that under the Roman government people suffered far worse conditions than we scarcely imagine. The world in which Jesus and the Apostles lived was a brutal environment.

In this hierarchical society, slaves, void of any rights, were at the bottom. Slightly above them were freed slaves, and then free-born citizens. Even the free-born citizens were divided by class so that each had certain rights. The father, as head of the household, held complete control over his household, from slaves to relatives. It was called *patria potestas*, "father's power." He could force their marriage or divorce, claim their property as his own, or even sell his children into slavery. As *patria potestas* he had the power to punish (by death if he so desired) any member of his household.

Jesus, eleven of the twelve Apostles, and thousands of believers were murdered by Rome: burned, beaten, crucified, stoned, made sport of and flayed alive. Yet neither Jesus, the Apostles, nor the early Church Fathers ever spoke out against Rome or encouraged socio-political reformation. Jesus certainly spoke out against the injustices in Israel, the people of the covenant, and the Apostles chastised the Christians for their inequities; but none spoke against Rome or encouraged their followers to do so. Their lack of voice was not due to cowardice, or even to a lack of concern. Their silence was motivated by their sense of duty.

It was Jesus' duty to take his cross upon himself that he might provide a propitiation for our sin. It was the Apostles' duty, and still is that of the Church, to proclaim Jesus and teach theology to the believers. These duties have eternal consequences. Establishing an earthly government is a temporal achievement with temporal rewards, and it is not our mission. The government, any government, no matter how godly it may seem, will wither with future generations; for man is a sinner by nature and the unconverted heart will always follow its

nature. It is powerless to choose any other course.

The Divisive Mission of the Church

While a primary role of human government is one of conciliation and compromise, in which opposing mindsets and worldviews find mutual ground upon which they can stand together, the mission of the Church is divisive, in direct opposition to this conciliatory, compromising feature of government. Of this divisiveness Jesus said,

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household (Matt. 10:34-35 NIV).

Of course, Jesus was not advocating war or internal familial battles; the family is a prized institution to be honored and cherished. Yet, at the same time, he knew the Gospel would create schism so divisive that even family members would be ostracized.

Being a follower of Jesus requires an admission of personal guilt and the need for a personal savior. The world loathes this scenario. It is offensive to them, to their pride, to their sense of self worth. It is for this reason the world hates Christianity and Judaism. The biblical doctrine of total depravity sheds light on man's sinful nature. The world has no problem with Hindus, Muslims, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, or followers of any other world religion because none of them convicts man of his sinful nature, which, if true, predicts the need for a qualified redeemer. This is insulting to those who fancy themselves self-sufficient. Thus Jesus said:

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you (Matt. 10:16-20 NIV).

It is impossible to model the world, or even a society, after the Judeo-Christian ethic. It cannot be legislated, nor coaxed with pleas to the conscience, for the heart of man is dark, born in sin and in sin it lives until, and if, reborn of the Spirit of God. There is a universal ethic, a universal conscience acceptable to the world, but it is very narrow. Such things as murder, theft, rape, unusual cruelty, etc., are generally intolerable, but even these can be justified when convenient. The unbeliever's conscience, as tender as it might be, can generally justify an offense to its own convictions when expedient, because its moral compass is ephemeral—an existential moving target that adapts to the situation. Because it rejects the Creator it abides no ultimate standard; therefore, everything is relative.

The Law Convicts

The law cannot, nor was it ever meant to, reform anyone. Man cannot be reformed, and attempting to reform him is an exercise in futility. The purpose of the law is to convict not to contain or reform. The law is simply meant to make the sinner aware of his sin; it is not meant to make the

sinner righteous. In this it is impotent. Paul explained it as such: “*the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless*” (1 Tim. 1:9). “*I had not known sin, but by the law*” (Rom. 7:7). Having inherited the nature of sin from Adam, man is unable to obey the law. It is only the new birth, and the Holy Spirit living within, that gives the believer the necessary power to follow the law.

What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-4).

Yet, even with this power dwelling within, the believer, still shackled to the Adamic nature, struggles to do that which he knows is right and is motivated to do. Therefore, attempting to make the spiritually dead live up to that with which even the spiritually alive struggle, is futile.

A society in spiritual darkness being ruled by a society of moralists does not promote evangelism. When it is attempted it has disastrous results. C. S. Lewis observed this with the wit we might expect:

Of all tyrannies a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It may be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron’s cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end, for they do so with the approval of their conscience.¹

¹ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Paperback - 346 pp.; Eerdmans, 1994), p. 292.

Those who suffer under such tyranny comply only under duress. Always, they are looking for opportunity to rebel. They will never, in good faith, convert to the totalitarianism which they despise.

Well meaning, but mistaken charismatic leaders are escorting us up John Bunyan’s cliffs of Mt. Zion, and we follow with great intensity. Evangelist warned Christian not to be tempted by the mountain’s appeal;² but, he too, had to see for himself. In the end he was sorry for his misguided zeal. So too will we. As long as the Church continues up the path of socio-political reformation it shall continue to work against God’s eternal design, and it shall continue to impede its evangelical effectiveness. Of this I am certain.

Civil Rights

Now this is not to argue that believers, as citizens of a free state, should not be socially and politically involved. Indeed, a case can be made that we, as individuals, ought to perform our civic duties as much as possible. In the context of being good citizens, we should let our lights shine by the nature of our deeds and godly behavior. We have evidence of such civic participation in the Apostle Paul. Although imprisoned and eventually martyred by Rome for his faith, neither as a Christian nor as an Apostle of the Church did he ever speak against Rome’s violation of him and his faith. However, in that he was a free Roman citizen, he did exercise his right to be heard by Caesar. And while he used this as an occasion to proclaim the Gospel, he did it without seeking imperial reformation.

There is a great difference between the Church, in an official capacity, supporting certain politicians or socio-political issues,

² A reference to John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Paperback; Fleming H Revell Co., 1999).

and the individual, as a good citizen, doing the same. The individual, as a good citizen, has a civic license for such activity. The Church, as God's institution given a specific spiritual task, does not. Regardless of the liberties any government might bestow upon the Church, the Church's spiritual mission supersedes its intervention in temporal, divisive objectives because such interventions frustrate the spiritual mission. Temporal issues necessarily create division. Often, even believers are on both sides of an issue. For the Church, or theologians, or pastors as representatives of the Church, to take sides in political controversy is contrary to the mission. It is playing into the opponent's deflection tactic.

We might recall this is what the Pharisees attempted to get Jesus to do in regard to taxes. Their reasoning was such that if they could get him to say the Jews should pay taxes to Rome, the people of Israel would be upset with him; and if they could get him to say Israel should not pay the taxes to Rome, the Roman government would be after him. Of course, his answer confounded their entire scheme, for he refused to take the bait: "*render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*" (Matt. 22:21).

The Church has a mission to proclaim the Gospel, not to reform temporal, socio-political establishments. The individual believer has this same mission, but as a free citizen he/she also has a civic duty to the socio-political establishment—even an invitation and a legislative right to participate. But this individual participation must be within the scope of the Great Commission as well as that of civic responsibilities. The Great Commission does not expect or desire the Church, as an institution, to legislate civic

reformation, nor does society expect or desire this reformation.

Socio-political Reform has Never Been God's Goal

These pseudo-missions of socio-political reformation (upon which much of Western Christendom has embarked) have never been God's goal in any age. When the Church, as an institution of God, seeks to establish godly governments, to bring social reform, to make non-believers conform to Christian ethics, it is working contrary to every dealing God has ever had with man through the ages. Reformation of the human condition has never been God's objective.

Upon confronting Adam and Eve with their sin, God did not offer a rehabilitation program. He did not suggest they reform their ways. He promised a Redeemer. God eventually surrendered the antediluvian world to its lusts, condemning the people to their own desires. He did not tell Noah to establish a better government that might enforce justice and ethical issues. God told Noah to build a boat that would save him from the coming destruction. Within five hundred years the postdiluvian world had also rebelled against God. He condemned it as well, not with immediate destruction, but with disinterest. Thus, God made a covenant with one man, Abraham. God did not tell Abraham to establish a better government among the Gentiles but demanded separation from them. Later, Moses was given laws to govern God's chosen people, but there was no instruction to impose these laws upon the Gentiles. And, as pointed out earlier, although Rome was an evil Empire, neither Jesus nor the Apostles ever sought to reform it.

We must not fool ourselves; socio-political evils are nothing new. These troubles were just as prevalent two

millennia ago when our Lord walked the earth. As far as our modern Western world is concerned, things were even worse than they are for us today. Yet neither Jesus nor the Apostles ever spoke out against Rome, never encouraged social reform or political rebellion. Later, the early Church fathers did nothing to reform it. None of them attempted to institute socio-political reform simply because it was not, and still is not, the mission of the Church. If it were, two things would certainly have happened. First, Jesus would have demonstrated it. He would have done a little social reform Himself. Secondly, He would have given a commandment to this regard. You would think at least one of the apostles would have mentioned something so important. But He did not. They did not. After all, what would be the point? As Peter so succinctly reminded, *“The dog is returned to its own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire”* (1 Pet. 2:2).

Of course, Jesus did speak out against Israel—God’s chosen people with whom He had a contract, one which they had all but forgotten. Having institutionalized an outward form of righteousness with their endless laws of godliness, few in Israel any longer held God dear to their hearts. Jesus’ rebuke of Israel was a point of house cleaning. He rebuked them for their apostasy and their injustices, but He said nothing to those outside the family, nothing to Rome or the Gentiles at large. Rather, he said, *“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* (Matt. 15:24). Likewise, later, when certain local churches strayed from the path an apostle rebuked them, but never did an apostle rebuke Rome, or seek to establish a better government.

Ultimately Human Government Must Fail

The doctrine of total depravity predicts that human governments must fail. All have sinned and fallen short; therefore, in that human government is an extension of the human condition, all human governments must fail:

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one (Psalm 14: 2-3).

Even Israel’s attempt at self-government failed as predicted. When Israel rejected Samuel (their God-appointed judge), insisting upon a king similar to those of surrounding nations, God consoled Samuel,

It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. . . . but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights (1 Sam. 8:7-9).

He will take your sons and your daughters and the best of all you have, and when you call to the Lord for relief you will not be heard. But of course, they did not heed the warning.

The results were very disappointing. What followed was century after century of self-serving kings with relatively few godly ones. Even when a righteous king sought the Lord, the people would soon rebel, and, once another king was on the throne, they would return to their evil ways. Eventually their kings were stripped of power and Israel came under Gentile rule. Then Israel began to construct its set of endless extra-biblical, religious laws which promoted an outward form of godliness. They became puffed up and full of self-righteousness, developing the pharisaical mindset Christ found and reprimanded.

So it is that even God’s chosen people aptly illustrate the doctrine of total

depravity. In spite of a strong priesthood, the prophets of God, and anointed kings, Israel's attempt at self governance failed miserably. The antediluvian civilization had done the same. Though great patriarchs walked among them—those who had walked with Adam and Eve, who had walked with God—in the end, God would bring but eight people from the ancient civilization through the flood and into the new world. In prophetic events yet to come, even with Christ physically reigning as King of the earth, multitudes will rebel (Rev. 20:8). Thus, it is quite clear to all, but the willingly ignorant, that man's self rule is doomed to failure.

This being understood let me take it a little further. The very idea of a godly or Christian nation is absurd. It is a subtle ploy of the enemy to distract us from our real mission. You can have an Islamic nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, an atheistic nation, or a nation of any other religion, for world religions merely require varying degrees of outward conformity and self-righteousness as one seeks to achieve a certain sense of heightened pseudo-spirituality. But you cannot have a Christian nation. Christianity is not like the world's religions. It is more than an outward conformity of distraught self-righteousness. The requisite righteousness of Christianity is not something achieved by one's own power, but by God's. It is a power bestowed on each believer upon spiritual rebirth. This cannot be legislated, and the mere outward conformity to the Christian ethic does not a Christian make. But it does make a nice hypocrite.

There has never been a Christian nation, nor has there ever been a command to establish one. Nations and kingdoms come and go like the grass. They are temporal and physical; our kingdom is eternal and spiritual. Our kingdom is not of this world. Any attempt, no matter how

righteous it may appear, to establish a holy nation or kingdom on earth is a disturbance, effectively replacing, abrogating, even sabotaging the true mission of the Church.

Three Detrimental Consequences of Social Reengineering

As evidenced by the chosen people of God (the children of Abraham), the doctrine to establish a righteous human government flies in the face of the biblical doctrine of total depravity. Although we may experience apparent positive changes for a few years or decades, ultimately, nothing good comes of imposed socio-political reform.

Beyond being diametrically opposed to the great commission, there are three detrimental consequences to the fallacious practice of social reengineering which the Church seeks to impose Christian ethics upon non-believers. Individuals might, to a considerable degree, will themselves to obey. But short of being reborn of the Spirit of God, their sinful nature is still in charge. It is for this reason Paul cried out "*O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death*" (Rom. 7:24). Of course, he concludes that Christ Jesus is the answer.

No good thing can come of imposing godliness on the ungodly. Although some superficially conform to these imposed ethics, this conformity is likely to culminate in disdain and revolt, for their hearts are still ruled by "*the law of sin and death*" (Rom. 8:2) toward which the law of righteousness is weak and unable to deliver (v.3), and thus, any outward conformity to righteousness is contrary to their nature. Those who live in the flesh set their minds on things of the flesh; they are at enmity with God and not subject to the law of God. They cannot please God (vv. 5-8) and they cannot please themselves; eventually they

rebel in some form and to some degree against any righteousness that has been imposed upon them, for *“no servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other”* (Luke 16:13-14).

The second possible unseemly outcome of imposing Christian ethics on the unbeliever is an assumed self-righteousness. Vainly overlooking their sin, focused only on what good they might have accomplished or are accomplishing, they puff themselves up, convinced they have no need of a savior: “What need does a good man have of a savior? Surely the good outweighs the bad and eternity is secure by these deeds alone.” Again, false conclusion is a rejection of the doctrine of total depravity, which clearly states, *“We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away”* (Isa. 65:6). For, *“there is none righteous, no not one”* (Rom. 3:10).

Because of this truth, any supposed reform achieved by imposed ethics is not only temporal, but condemning. When judgment day comes these individuals will be held accountable for yet another failure—the self-righteousness they assumed while proudly conforming to the imposed ethic.

The third detrimental issue with Church-imposed social reengineering is that it makes folks turn a deaf ear to the Gospel. The Church’s views on certain temporal issues are sure to offend many citizens, simply because their nature will not and cannot abide the virtues the Church will promote.

The first rule of effective evangelism is to establish common ground. Find an issue upon which we, and the one with whom we are attempting to share the Gospel, can

agree. From here we lead into the presentation of Christ and salvation. Thus, Paul said *“I am all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”* (1 Cor 2:99). He is finding common ground from which he might share the Gospel. Imagine the outcome at the Areopagus (Acts 17) if Paul had introduced his theology by first condemning the beliefs and hedonistic practices of the various religions with their altars dedicated to their many pagan deities. Rather, he meekly observed their altar *“To The Unknown God”*; to which he said, let me tell you about Him.

As stewards of evangelism, our objective is to escort souls to an introduction with the one who bestows life and righteousness. It is not our role to hurl stones of righteous indignation. We are mere fellow sinners fortunate enough to be elected unto redemption, the reality of which should humble us to the point of tears. How can we look upon those in darkness with anything but sympathy? We do not have the right to reprimand them or their actions. For they are us; we are them. The only distinction: we have experienced the grace of God.

After warning his listeners to judge not lest they be judged, Jesus warned against the hypocrisy of looking at the speck in their brother’s eye but not considering the plank in their own. He then instructed them, *“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces”* (Matt. 7:1-6). In the issue of Church instigated socio-political reformation, all three warnings are applicable. We shall be judged with the judgment we employ; we ourselves are struggling sinners; and why bother imposing righteousness on those who do not want it, cannot receive it and have rejected it? Of course, with this last issue of “casting pearls before swine,” Jesus was

primarily speaking of continuing to proclaim the Gospel to those that have rejected it, but this principle also extends to godliness itself. Continuing to cast godliness in the face of the ungodly is a futile endeavor. There is a better option.

Having received this grace, we are now the salt of the earth, expected to bring forth and enhance the pathos and savor of life. We are not to be bitter herbs that turn a stomach into knots. We are the light of the world extending hope to those in darkness. We are not the judge giving the sentence to darkness. Leave the sentencing to God. He is just. He is qualified.

When the Church becomes involved in the passionately heated battles of socio-political reform, we effectively negate many opportunities to establish common ground with the very society we hope to reach. We cannot establish common ground with someone who will not listen to anything we have to say. And be assured, once passions are inflamed over one of these mere temporal issues, deaf ears are turned to all who oppose their passion. I learned long ago that there is a standing rule in all debates over ideals: passion is never convinced by logic. Once you oppose and enrage passion, you have effectively lost all credibility. You cannot infuriate a person over one issue and then expect to persuade him in another.

It is one thing to offend with the Gospel: indeed proclaiming the Gospel and having it offend the hearer is the expectation. But unnecessarily offending those to whom we wish to proclaim the Gospel by arguing about temporal issues that are ultimately doomed to failure regardless of the sitting government is contrary to our mission. Furthermore, even if we were to convince them to abide by our ethic, eventually they would either rebel or become self-righteous, neither of which is our objective.

Effective Witness

Proclaim the Gospel and give a living testimony; these are the means by which we give effective witness for our Lord. It is this aspect of “living testimony” in which western evangelical orthodoxy often falls short. Too often our testimony is eclipsed by misdirected ideology. Our traditions, our legalism, and our pharisaical dogma over minor temporal socio-political issues overshadow our testimony, making it virtually of no effect. A message is seldom heeded when the messenger is held in contempt or mistrust. We seem not to grasp the reality that proclamation without effective testimony is little more than empty words.

This living testimony is best exhibited by love. Jesus said, “*By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another*” (Jn. 13:35). People are in pain, spiritually and emotionally. They need to be loved. We need to be loved. We need God’s love. We need God’s love demonstrated through others. And just as important, we need to demonstrate God’s love to others. The population to which we proclaim the Gospel is in spiritual darkness, living in Satan’s domain. They need to know God. They need to be enlightened by the Spirit of God. The Church is the vehicle that provides them knowledge of the Savior. This is the mission of the Church.

The Apostle pleaded to the Galatians, who themselves were misdirected in certain issues, “*as we . . . have opportunity, let us do good to all men . . .*” (Gal. 6:10). This is the tender and loving spirit that Jesus demonstrated to the harlot at the well, to the repugnant lepers, and to the greedy tax collector. It is a spirit far different from that which incites and rallies protesters to picketing, sit-ins, public condemnation rallies, class or race baiting, and righteous terrorism. The mission of the Church is

evangelism carried out in love. It is not social reformation inspired by bitter dogmatism.

We cannot animate a dead body, no matter how long we do CPR, or how many infusions of epinephrine, atropine and bicarbonate we provide. Dead is dead. The world is dead in spirit, severed from the only means of righteousness, the head, Jesus Christ. No attempt by the Church to revive those who are dead in spirit is evangelism.

Conclusion

While it may seem righteous, even necessary, for the Church to cry out over socio-political issues, in truth, such actions hinder the true mission of the Church. Ironically, in principle this attempt to establish a false national holiness is doing the very thing that Moses refused to do. That is, to substitute the eternal for the temporal. In faith, his refusal to exercise his privileges as an Egyptian citizen and aristocrat pitted him against his own people.

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward (Heb. 11:235-26).

While it may not be sin for the Church, overtly, to use its clout to manipulate socio-political issues, it is certainly an exercise of faithlessness. In faithlessness, we are bent upon controlling temporal issues, disregarding the effect upon the eternal mission set before us.

It is not the mission of the Church to pursue socio-political reform, nor will it ever be. It is simply not, nor ever has been God's objective on earth. The righteous kingdom will be established in time, upon

Christ's return. Then all will walk by God's law. Until then, we are to proclaim the Good News, the news that a Savior was born who paid the price for our sin with His death; the news that He has risen from the grave and offers forgiveness to all who seek him.

As appealing as it may be, the Church must deny the temptation to orchestrate socio-political activism and godly nation-building. The Church must recognize this temptation for what it is—a subtle diversion set in motion by our enemy. Sadly, the consequences of such activities go far beyond what one might expect of a more subtle diversion, for when the Church pursues these diversions, losing sight of its mission, it is effectively losing the battle. Even when seemingly victorious, bringing society about to an outward conformity to our ethic, we have lost. A few, or even many, skirmishes might be won; a summit might be taken, the flag raised and righteousness established as the rule of law in the land, but we have lost because we have fought the wrong battle, taken the wrong summit, advanced the wrong kingdom. Our mission is to establish a kingdom in the hearts of men, not under their feet.

Not only is it the wrong battle, but it is counterproductive to the real battle. Our efforts merely spawn strong negative ideals and emotions among the very souls we hope to reach, thereby setting in motion the resultant aftermath. A non-believing society's heartless conformity to unwanted morals generates one of three possible scenarios: rebellion, self-righteousness, inflamed passions.

Meddling in the emotionally charged affairs of the spiritually dead, withering, temporal world accomplishes nothing good. However, by inciting the hearts of those we hope to evangelize, we aggravate our evangelical mission. For once we have

offended the myopic passions of their beloved, fleeting causes we have little to no hope of ever reaching them with the Gospel. At this point, we have lost all credibility in their eyes. Our message of eternal salvation merely falls on deaf ears, ears that are fervently plugged with the stained and decaying rags of the ever-present temporal issues. Regardless of any seemingly honorable societal structure we might achieve, men's hearts are evil, in need of spiritual rebirth, not temporal conformity.

Furthermore, no matter how ordered or encompassing all governments, all socio-political structures, are transitory. In the end, they crumble, giving way to total depravity. Christians are charged to go out among the world and evangelize, to establish the kingdom of God in the hearts of men, not to cloister themselves in singular communities, isolated from the world, isolated from those in need of salvation. Nor are we commanded to construct nations of such singular communities. There is no biblical command or precedent to justify such an abrogation of duty: that our children might have better lives; that we might be better equipped to send forth missionaries; that we might contain evil deeds; that we might honor God; that we might . . . , etc; they are all excesses of either the theologically ignorant or the theologically deceived. Nothing good has ever, or can ever, come of attempting to build a godly or Christian nation. Yes, it sounds like a righteous cause, but it is not Christianity's objective. It is a subtle, self-gratifying diversion, a hindrance to the true mission set before us.

Attempting to bring in the kingdom before its time is not that dissimilar to Israel's strong desire for the Messiah to come in power and glory versus humility. So committed were they to this objective that they vehemently rejected his clearly

prophesied sacrificial appearance. Let us not be those who seek to put the cart before the horse, attempting to bring in the kingdom before its time. Not only is it futile, it is contrary to our charge. The world and its governments are in Satan's control. Any attempt at societal reformation disregards the doctrine of total depravity: "*They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one*" (Ps. 14:2-3). Thus, reform of any kind is not an option. It is, however, the commission of the Church to

Go and make disciples of all the nations and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you and, remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20, Phillips).

We seem to have forgotten that God established governments for a purpose, even evil governments. Certainly our actions show no consideration of this. Have we no faith in Him? Are we so foolish as to believe that He needs our help? Ultimately, God is in control. Just as the Holy Spirit works upon your conscience, and mine, so too He works upon the consciousness of those in power. He works as a restraining force against evil (2 Thess. 2:6). If God so desired, He could shatter any and every government like a broken mirror (Am. 9:8). The only power they have is the power with which He has entrusted them (1 Ki. 16:1-4); they are working according to His plan. When the Church speaks ill and displays animosity toward the government, it is essentially displaying displeasure with the way God is orchestrating the course of the world.

There are many governments that have little or no Christian constituents; our efforts of persuasion would be better spent

seeking to birth them some. This is the mission. It is a mission with eternal consequence. Governments and societies are transient. They come and go like the seasons. Overpower this one and tomorrow you face another. It is a temporal and fleeting battle, whereas souls are eternal. Let us leave the building and toppling of governments to God. After all, He's been doing it for a while, and so far everything has gone according to plan. My wife is a wonderful cook. I am not. So I suppose it is appropriate that when I walk into the kitchen half way through the preparation of a particular dish, and give a few suggestions, she runs me off in an obvious display of irritation. Let us let God complete His project as planned. He doesn't need us straying into the kitchen and shaking the spices. He has commissioned us to a different project. Let us stick to the task at hand.

1 C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Paperback – p. 346, Eerdmans, 1994), p. 292.

2 A reference to John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Paperback; Fleming H Revell Co., 1999).