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DEVELOP CONVICTIONS IN AN AGE OF CONFUSION

WHERE DO YOU STAND ON ISSUES OF:

TRUTH

SEX

ABORTION

HOMOSEXUALITY

THE ENVIRONMENT

CHURCH AND POLITICS

MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

If there ever was a time for Christians to understand and communicate God's truth about controversial and polarizing issues, it is now. More than ever before, believers must develop convictions based on research, reason and biblical truth. But it doesn't stop there. It's equally important that believers are able (and willing) to communicate these convictions with the love and respect that reflects God's own heart.

In this study, Chip Ingram will help you learn how to respond with love, even in the face of controversy. In the process, you'll discover the power of bringing light—not heat—to the core issues at the heart of society today.

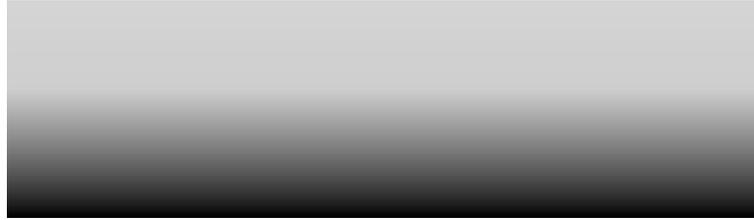
CULTURE SHOCK

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO TODAY'S MOST DIVISIVE ISSUES

2014 by Chip Ingram

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POLITICS

WHAT'S THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH?

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's;
and to God the things that are God's.

Matthew 22:21 NASB
Jesus of Nazareth

Many years ago, after preaching about the sanctity of human life, I received a letter from a woman that had to be, at the time, the most scathing letter in my young pastoral career. Right out of the gate she said, “I can’t believe you were talking about politics in the Church! Why don’t you preachers keep your noses in the Bible and out of politics? When I come to church, this is not what I want to hear! You should be excommunicated from ministry! You shouldn’t even be a pastor! It’s the worst, most horrific...” And on and on and on it went.

I remember leaning back thinking, *Oh my lands! A moral issue becomes political and I teach right out of the Bible about how God cherished us, even while in our mother’s womb [Psalm 139], and this is what I get?*

Later I learned that she didn’t even attend the service. She heard about the sermon from a friend, and from her perspective this was undoubtedly a political issue. She basically said to me, “How could you say you love God and talk about that in church?” even though it was a core, Biblical, moral issue.

On the other hand, I’ve been greeted in the hallways of the church, in the mall, or even in my office with people who have red faces and bulging veins, who scream three inches from my face, “You don’t understand! If you don’t take a stand right now on this issue

[or support this candidate or tell people how to vote], America's going to hell! It's time for the Church to say it like it is from the pulpit and step up!" What these people are saying to me is, "How can you say you love God and not take a stand on political issues in the Church?"

Well, I have to tell you that, in all my years as a pastor, I have found few issues that are so divisive, that cut so deep, that anger so many, or that have more Christians at odds with one another than the issues of the Church and politics. And when you dive into this subject, you find some people who think there should be no church involvement (often called "separatists") and others who think there should be complete involvement ("activists").

My goal in this chapter is to bring a little light to this issue instead of pouring gasoline on the fire. And in so doing, I hope we can unpack some presuppositions together and better understand why people sincerely and passionately think the way they do.

The Separatist

Their Premise

How can you love God, yet talk about politics in the Church?

Their Position

Any subject that is political, directly or indirectly, should never be talked about from the pulpit.

Their Presuppositions

Like the woman who wrote the scathing letter, some people view politics as “off limits” in a church setting. I’ve observed three presuppositions that are behind this type of thinking.

First is a clear distinction between what’s “sacred” and what’s “secular.” Faith is a private spiritual relationship where you share sacred moments with God. The world, politics, and everything in between are secular. Some believe these two should never mix and Christian involvement in government should be at an absolute minimum.

Second is a sincere but confused understanding of the difference between a “pluralistic” society versus “pluralism.” (See chapter 1 for an explanation of the roots of pluralism in our society.) A pluralistic society believes that we have the right to champion our ideas. We can debate and vote on ideas, but the best ones and the truth will win out. America has loosely followed this model throughout its history. Recently our society has been leaning more and more toward pluralism. That is, every idea has equal weight and value. So for you to say that one idea or position is superior to another is viewed as intolerant.

Third, some believe all government is corrupt. They might tell you, “There’s been too much talk and no action. It doesn’t matter who I vote for, or if I even vote, because it won’t make a difference anyway,” This group is what I call “functional separatists.” They’re disillusioned and completely disengaged.

The Activist

Their Premise

How can you love God and *not* take a stand on political issues in the Church?

Their Position

The Church is a tool in the hand of God to turn the secular culture back to Him. They look to the Church to exercise its voice and actively support candidates, issues, and laws that would bring about an alignment between our government, our culture, and Biblical values.

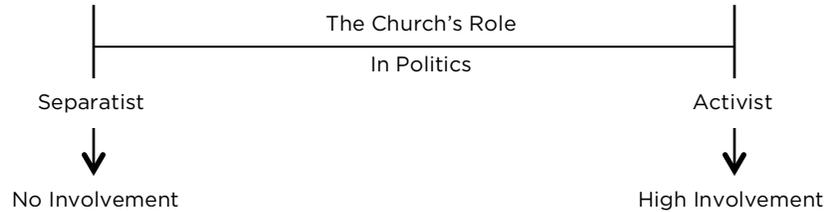
Their Presuppositions

I've observed three presuppositions behind this point of view.

First, America has a special, covenant relationship with God. This isn't your typical "Biblical worldview in common" type of argument. This position views America's relationship with God not unlike God's covenant relationship with Israel. In this view the goal of the Church is to bring America back to God, and what better way than to be an instrument in God's hand to do just that?

Second, moral and cultural change is the primary mandate of the Church. Basically, by using the political process, the Church's main focus should be on changing the culture, laws, and people so they reflect Biblical values. These people see the Church as a "bully pulpit" and its purpose to achieve Biblical values and corresponding laws largely through the political process.

Third, the Church gathered (or church as a corporate institution) and each “individual Christian” should have the same calling. That is, whatever we do when we’re gathered together as a corporate church body, or as an official position, this calling is the same in the life of each follower of Christ.



Some of you may be thinking, “I definitely believe that” or “What’s wrong if I believe that?” And still others may be thinking, “Gee, I guess I never really thought about it that way.” Please remember that there are a lot of opinions out there about what we’ve just discussed.

Before we start arguing about whether we, in church, should interview political candidates, keep our noses out of the political arena, or have voting guides available, let’s take a step back. Let’s suspend our strong emotions and get a clear view of what the Bible says about this issue. What does Scripture specifically teach about the role of the Church? When I say the Church, I mean the responsibility of the corporate entity, the Church gathered, and not individual believers. And finally, what does the Bible say about the Church and politics, the role of the government, and our role as individual believers?

The Bible's Absolutes

How can we navigate through the maze of the “Church and politics” conflict?

Scripture does not offer a simple solution like “1 Politics 1:9,” but it does provide *four biblical absolutes* to build a theological framework in which we can think clearly about the Church and politics. With these absolutes we will be able to develop some timeless principles to evaluate the separatist and activist positions.

Absolute 1: There are two kingdoms in conflict.

Our first Biblical absolute comes from the very lips of Jesus. He has been in ministry for around three years and his popularity and messages threaten the Jewish leaders. They are afraid that if they let Jesus continue to preach, the Roman Empire or the multitudes will remove them from their positions of power. So they devise a plan, arrest Jesus, and bring Him before Pilate, representing the official government of the day, to have Him crucified. They do this because Jewish law does not allow putting a man to death, but Roman law does. Pilate explains to Jesus that He’s been handed over by His own people, and he wants to hear why He deserves a death sentence.

Jesus replies in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” Verse 37 records Pilate’s response, “You are a king, then!”

Jesus answers in the same verse, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

What Jesus is saying is that there's a different kingdom, His kingdom. It isn't of this world and it's rooted in truth. He's pointing out that there are two kingdoms in conflict. First, there is a spiritual, eternal kingdom that Jesus - the Messiah, the Son of God - came to earth to reveal and establish through all those who believe. Then there is the temporal, physical kingdom we live in. This sometimes is referred to as the world's system.

So Pilate, frustrated by Jesus' vague and veiled responses, and by the Jews' unwilling-ness to free Jesus after twice declaring he finds no basis for a charge against Him, replies, "Do you refuse to speak to me?... Don't you realize I have the power either to free you or to crucify you?" (John 19:10). Pilate is flat out telling Jesus, "Don't you get it, Jesus? I have all power and authority over your life in this very moment and you have nothing to say?"

Here's where our first absolute becomes clear. Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above, Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin" (v.11).

Jesus' ministry, then and now, is building a spiritual kingdom of love and justice that will ultimately consummate when He returns. So until then, we live in two kingdoms, a spiritual kingdom and a physical kingdom. They are at odds with one another, constantly in conflict.

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This raises a crucial question. How are we to live in two kingdoms? And a follow-up to that is, How do we maintain our loyalty and values of following Jesus when they are in direct conflict with the values and laws of the country we live in? The answer may surprise you.

Absolute 2: Every believer has dual citizenship.

This brings us to the second absolute of the Church and politics. Every believer has dual citizenship. The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 3:20 that, if we are born-again believers of Jesus Christ, “our citizenship is in heaven.”

Jesus models and explains this dual citizenship in Mark 12:13-17. The setting is contentious and heated. The religious leaders are feeling very threatened; so much so that two groups normally at odds relationally and theologically join forces to eliminate Jesus. They are as far right and as far left as you can imagine. But they agree on one thing: they have a common enemy: Jesus. His popularity, His power with the people, His preaching and teaching are in direct opposition to the religious establishment they control, resulting in a plot to discredit and kill Him. We pick up the story in Mark 12:13-15:

Later they sent some of the Pharisees [right wingers theologically] and Herodians [left wingers theologically] to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, “Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn’t we?”

The trap has been set. These two groups of religious leaders have devised what they believe is the perfect question to discredit Jesus. Robed in hypocrisy and attempting to appear sincere, they are sitting on the proverbial edge of their seats thinking, "It doesn't matter what He says, we've got Him now!" If He says they should pay Caesar, the Jewish people will be against Him, but if He answers, "No, we shouldn't pay Caesar," He will be defying the Roman government. So whatever He says, they don't care. Their goal is not to receive an honest answer but to neutralize Jesus' power and influence. His answer not only stuns His opponents, but provides us with the answer to our question of how to live in two kingdoms in conflict.

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." (Mark 12:15-17)

The Jewish leaders use the Greek word *didomi* when they ask Jesus about whom they should pay. This word means "Just give something." In His answer, Jesus uses a different word for "pay." He uses *apodidomi*, which means "to fulfill a debt" or "pay off."

So what He's really saying is, "You have an absolute debt or obligation to Caesar and the government, to give whatever they ask. You also have an equal, if not more important obligation to give to God whatever He asks of you." In other words, every believer has dual citizenship.

You are to be faithful in your citizenship in heaven and faithful in your citizenship here on earth with the governmental authority you're under. But how can we be faithful to both when there's such corruption and evil in the world? The answer to that question leads us to Biblical absolute number three.

Absolute 3: Human governments are ordained by God to restrain evil.

During the time the apostle Paul is writing his letter to the Romans, they were facing serious persecution. And the Roman Empire was deeply corrupt. The injustice and brutality were at an all-time high, infanticide was normal, women were bought and sold as property, slavery was widespread, and immorality ran rampant. It was a culture characterized by sexual license and power with abuse - anything you wanted, any way you wanted, and any time you wanted it.

In this setting, Paul teaches this struggling church how to live out their dual citizenship. He gives them and us some clear instructions on how we can live out our faith in the two kingdoms in conflict. He writes in Romans 13:1-3:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended.

Here the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is defining the role of government. His thesis is that God in His sovereignty has allowed and even placed government authority to fulfill His purposes. He explains that purpose beginning in verse 4: “For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” The application is clear from this passage both then and now. Whether you lived in Rome in the first century as a Christian or live in Communist China or in America under a democracy today, the government is ordained by God to restrain evil.

The role of government according to Scripture is very simple: it’s to restrain evil.

He outlines our response to the government in verse 5: “It is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.” Paul is putting a box around how we obey God by submitting to the governing authorities, as long as they don’t violate His Word.

The government doesn’t have the power to change people’s hearts; nor is its purpose from God’s perspective to transform culture and bring about righteousness. The role of government according to Scripture is very simple: it’s to restrain from evil.

But if the government doesn’t have the power to bring about moral and cultural change resulting in justice, love, equality, and righteousness, then how is that ever going to happen? What the government can’t do through *external control*, God will do through His people.

Absolute 4: The Church is ordained by God to make disciples.

The Bible tells us plainly that the Church is ordained by God to make disciples. The Church, the body of Christ, has a very special purpose, and it is to help its constituents live the way Jesus lived, love the way Jesus loved, and become salt and light in an evil and fallen world. The Church is God's agent of righteousness and love. Even in the midst of absolute evil and terrible governments, Christians live out supernatural, winsome, and holy lives. Throughout human history we have seen this played out –

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from feeding the poor, to building hospitals and orphanages, to caring for lepers, survivors of plagues, and victims of HIV. The Church has made a difference despite all the troubles and ills in society. Followers of Jesus have been at the forefront of bringing moral and cultural change not by external force, but by *internal transformation.*

Matthew 28:18-20 spells out Christ's agenda for His people: "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" Here's what Jesus wants you and me to do. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of

the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I commanded you."

And when it gets out of control, when you're afraid, when you think it's impossible, and when you're worn out, He says, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (v. 20).

Making disciples is not as complicated as you may think. It's first and foremost about a relationship. It's about how you live. It's about living, by the power of the Holy Spirit, like Jesus in your arena of influence at home, at work, everywhere! It's about permeating the lives of those around you with hope, love, and genuine concern. While modeling righteous values even when it's not popular. You do that by fulfilling your role with the government and submitting. You realize that God in His sovereignty has placed you in a country under a dictatorship, a democracy, a communist regime, or whatever form of government you're under for His purpose. And God says, "In the midst of the corruption, evil, and pain that exists in all governments and societies, I want you to be 'little Christs,' whom I will use to transform lives and laws and cultures from the inside out. Like the leaven that starts small and saturates the whole loaf, I will use my ordinary followers to bring about change and goodness beyond their wildest imaginations."

If you think I'm overstating my case, let me share a story that will help you see how God works. I have a close friend whom I've known for almost twenty years. We have a ton in common. We have the same, exact birthday so we are the same age. We were both disciples by the same parachurch group. And we are both in positions of influence that we never dreamed we would have.

This is a passionate Christ-follower who gets up every morning and reads God's Word. He's hungry for ways to grow his faith. He leads a Bible study, serves in his church, and meets with men to mentor

and disciple them. He “gets” two things unequivocally: (1) “I am to follow Jesus personally,” and (2) “I’m supposed to help change the world in my sphere of influence.” David is Chinese, and after he finished his education in America, he went back to Hong Kong and eventually became the CEO of one of the largest corporations in China.

A little over a year ago, we were having lunch and I asked him, “Tell me, David, how do you do it? I mean, with all the persecution in China, how are you able to live the Christian life and help others grow in their faith?” He looked me right in the eyes and said, “You know, Chip, when Christians live like Christians and we’re the very best citizens, it’s amazing the favor God gives us with the government.”

He said, “I was having lunch with the Minister for Religious Affairs.” My jaw dropped. In other words, he was meeting with the person in China who’s in charge of anything religious for the entire country. And the Minister for Religious Affairs said, “Look, when you bring all of your accounting and financial people into the major cities for training, you are free to gather in groups of up to one hundred people. You can pray, you can worship, you can invite people and do what you want, but don’t get too big and don’t get noisy about it. Your firm with its ethics and integrity is what China needs. I’m not opposed to your Christianity; it’s actually quite helpful to our society. What we don’t want in China is destabilization.”

Now, is there persecution of Christians in China? Absolutely. But hear this: the reason this particular group has been given such freedom is because of the lifestyles of the believers in David’s firm. They’re honest, trustworthy, and exemplary in their work.

What the Chinese government understands is that they can trust the kind of people who work for David's firm.

David continued, "In every province there's a huge growth in home churches, and Christians are positively impacting their communities. The result is prosperity. Christians obeying the government except when told not to read the Bible or pray demonstrates the power of the gospel even in the most adverse circumstances." These Christians are transforming the spiritual and moral climate of their country without destabilizing the government's power.

Governments have the power to restrain evil. They don't have the power, laws don't have the power, and Supreme Court justices don't have the power to create righteousness in people's hearts.

So as believers of Jesus Christ, we live in two kingdoms that are in conflict. We all have dual citizenship, one in heaven and one in our country. The government is ordained to restrain evil and the Church is called to make authentic disciples, resulting in internal transformation of lives, values, and morals.

These four Biblical absolutes help us think clearly about the role of the Church, the government, and the individual believer. Now let's tackle the big question.

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The Big Question: How Do We Move from a Theological Framework to Specific Application for Daily Living?

If you're like me, the first question you have is, "So how do we put this into practice? How do these four absolutes play out in the Church and in addressing the political issues that we face today?" Let me suggest six Biblical principles that emerge from our study that help us understand and apply the roles and responsibilities of the church, the government, and individual believer in the political arena. When we clarify the role and responsibility of each, then we can make honest, educated decisions about what the Church should do, what the government should do, and what individual Christians should do.

1. Let the Church be the Church!

The Church's highest calling and purpose is to fulfill the spiritual and eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So first and foremost, we need to let the Church be the Church. Its goal is to exalt Christ - to preach, teach, and model the message of redemption which is more important than anything else (see Matt. 28:18-20).

2. Pray.

So how do we let the Church be the Church? We pray. First Timothy 2:1-4 says, "I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

We pray for those in authority, not so the economy gets better or to make our lives easier. We pray for our authorities so that there will be peace in the land. This in turn leads the way for the gospel to go forth so transformation can occur. This command holds true whether or not you agree with who is in power. The Scripture is clear: whoever is in office is ultimately established by God. And the first requirement of the Church and of individual believers is to pray for them.

Unfortunately, Christians have come to be characterized as narrow-minded, critical people who write, post pictures, blog, and email negative propaganda about those they oppose in elections. This is certainly not a fair assessment of most Christians, but the actions of some have painted Christians as hateful and unloving people. Despite their sincere motives and deep concerns over our moral decline, I fear our political profile has deeply undermined our primary focus - the gospel.

I honestly wonder what would happen if we took a moment and prayed for the officials in authority. What if we cared about the souls of those in authority and truly, sincerely prayed for them to come to know the truth of Jesus Christ? What if we got to know them, took an interest in their lives, and tried to understand them before firing off the next email or petition?

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3. Preach and teach.

After we pray as a church body, the Church is called to preach and teach the truth of God's Word. The Church is called to equip individual believers with a Biblical worldview. Teaching God's values helps individual Christians develop Biblical convictions about moral issues like abortion, sexuality, homosexuality, and stewardship of the environment. They have become "hot" and divisive issues in our day and Christians tend to align around their party affiliation (Democrat, Republican) instead of Scripture. God is looking for His children to choose His way first. He's looking for them to say, "God, I am Your child before I am a Democrat or a Republican or an Independent. What do You want me to do, what do You want me to say, and how do You want me to vote on these issues? Which candidates, regardless of party affiliations, will most honor You? The Church's job is not to tell people how to vote but to teach what God declares as true.

Did you ever notice in John 18:37 that when Jesus was talking to Pilate He said, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me"? Or when the Jewish leaders tried to trap Jesus, they said, "We know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth" (Matt. 22:16)?

So, is truth absolute or relative? If God's Word never changes, does truth? What is the truth about human sexuality? What is the truth about homosexuality? What is the truth about abortion and the environment? We are called to be the rudder of society by teaching and living the truth. That is the job of the Church.

4. Live the life.

In Acts 2:40-47 we see the early Church in action. The apostles prayed, devoted their time to preaching and teaching, and modeled a life devoted to Christ. People met at the temple for large group worship and instruction, and in homes, where they broke bread together. They lived in a decadent culture, with a corrupt government, where there was tremendous injustice, unspeakable immorality, and a god on every corner to worship. They were viewed as a radical sect or cult and accused of incest (because they called each other brother and sister) and were believed to be atheists (because they didn't worship the emperor as god).

Yet God empowered this small, countercultural group as they came together and walked and talked and acted like Jesus. They were politically powerless, but they surrendered their lives to Christ and met the deepest needs in their community. They didn't complain, they didn't gossip, they didn't judge. They cared. They fed the poor. They lived their lives together and loved one another. They changed the world. When the Church is the Church, we are our best, most influential selves. There's a role for individual believers in politics and the government must restrain evil, but transformation of the heart always precedes lasting transformation in the culture. How can that happen today?

Start a ministry for unwed mothers, feed the poor, shelter the homeless, start a compassion ministry – just do something. When

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Christians live like Christians, we are the most winsome, powerful group on the face of the earth!

So, let's live the life. Let's radically live out this model of spiritual integrity, the highest calling of Christ for the Church.

5. Don't expect the government to achieve what only the Church can do!

When political issues come up, I often hear fellow Christians say something like, "If we could only get the right person in office, we could turn this whole thing around and back to God." We unconsciously believe that the political process has the power to change the culture, change people's hearts, and make the world the way many Christians think it ought to be. But the Bible says the government has political limitations. Its ability solely rests in its power to restrain evil.

God says the foundations of His throne are justice and righteousness. He also says that righteousness exalts people and a nation. The government cannot create righteousness; only individual believers living out their faith in His power make that contribution.

I believe many Christians have unconsciously fallen into thinking moral and cultural change will come through some sort of messiah government group. With this thesis, we have witnessed thirty years of cultural wars, where the Church became a pawn in political power plays (by the left and the right). Each side believing that the "America we want" will be achieved when "we hold the White House, the majority in the Senate and the House, and appoint

judges who think like us.” Unfortunately, history has seen both the left and the right achieve the above with little or no change in violence, divorce, crime, poverty, and injustice. The government can’t produce righteousness, but it can and does restrain evil.

Have you heard this before? “You can’t legislate morality.” And if by that, you mean you can’t change people’s hearts to have them do the right thing for the right reason, then I totally agree. Ironically, what laws actually are meant for is legislating morality. It’s morally wrong to murder someone – it puts you in jail. It is morally wrong to steal or not pay your taxes – you get put in jail.

Those are moral issues. The government can legislate morality with laws that create boundaries to keep you protected. They can’t bring about changes in the human heart. Our hope cannot be placed in candidates or political systems.

I love what Chuck Colson said: “The danger with Christian political movements, per se, is that they tend to make the gospel hostage to particular political agendas. You may wrap the cross in the flag and make God a prop for the state. And this is a grave danger.”¹

At the core of moral and cultural change is not changed laws, Supreme Court Justice appointments, or referendum victories. It’s a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that changes you and changes the culture, from the inside out.

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6. Don't expect the Church to accomplish what only individual believers can achieve!

As a pastor and church leader for over thirty years, I can tell you that a lot of people want the Church to promote their political agenda. I receive many letters and have multiple hallway conversations where I am strongly encouraged to "preach on that," interview candidates, take a stand, or pass out voting guides. What these Christians don't realize is that all those things are the role of the individual believer, not the Church. The overarching message of exalting Christ and the message of redemption and His kingdom agenda is God's priority when we're gathered corporately. God is not a Republican, Democrat, or Independent. He is absolutely 100 percent committed to having born-again, kingdom-minded followers fulfilling His agenda, above all others.

Unfortunately, the Church has been hijacked and the pulpit used by the Right and the Left to promote their agendas. God's Church has become a venue and vehicle to argue over issues, candidates, and agendas. Scriptural focus and kingdom principles are replaced with whom you should support and how you can help. At the end of the day, elections appear to tilt by the one that populous believes can make their lives and the economy better. When you get to the heart of it, far more than kingdom voters, we've become pragmatic materialists. We're not asking, "God what do *You* want in this country? What do *You* want me to do?" We're asking, "Who has the better plan to make my life and my future better?" The Church and politics together has become a slippery slope, where much of what is said and done in the name of God is little more than idolatry, using God and His name to achieve personal agendas.

Scripture is very clear about our dual citizenship. We will be held accountable before God for our faithfulness in both arenas. The separatists and the activists both have it wrong. Separation for the Church is not the answer. Activism in the Church gathered is not the answer. The answer is two words: **individual responsibility!**

We have to ask ourselves, "If there is a kingdom of heaven that is spiritual and eternal and our allegiance is first to Christ, shouldn't that be our priority, first and foremost?" We all want the government to change things, we want the Church gathered to change things, but Jesus would say, "You are the light, you are the salt, you are the leaven."

Change comes when we as individuals see it is our responsibility - not the government's or the Church's - to make a difference. Change happens when Christians begin to say, "I'm going to be informed. I'm going to vote. I'm going to find out the calling on my life to meet the real needs in my community." It's time to get out and actually do something that brings about real, concrete change in hurting people's lives. It's time to be Jesus to those who desperately need Him.

In his book *How Should Christians Vote?* Tony Evans has a chapter titled "Is God a Democrat or Republican?" And what he says is truly insightful about what our individual role in society should be.

Tony writes, "The Scripture clearly states the role of the believer, in the midst of society."²

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He quotes 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 under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden, 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. 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” (NASB).

Tony continues, “Our job as Christians is to infiltrate where the bacteria of unrighteousness and darkness have permeated and made themselves at home. It’s our job to act as salt and light in both parties and offer the Kingdom’s point of view. One way you do that in a constitutional republic is through your vote.”³

What is happening at the end of the day is that many of us want someone else to accomplish what God says is our job. So get informed, register to vote, and then actually vote. Of the sixty million evangelicals in the United States, only twenty million voted in the last election. That means two-thirds missed an opportunity to put God first and cast a kingdom vote.

The research I did on specific propositions, specific judges, and specific candidates showed that the win was accomplished by only a few hundred or a few thousand votes. Imagine if the other forty million evangelicals voted according to Biblical convictions, not party lines.

We’ve retreated and said, “The government solves the problems or gets the Church to be a political bully,” rather than saying, “We’re the salt, we’re the light, we’re the agents of change” - one person, one community at a time.

In some countries like Communist China, for example, you don't get to vote; you get to be a citizen. Yes, you get to live out your faith, but the moment they say you can't do something that God says you are supposed to do is when you'll exercise civil disobedience. You might be a Daniel and say, "I'm sorry, but you can't tell me that I cannot pray. I'm going to pray. Put me in jail, if that's the consequence; but I will still pray."

We are called to take part and participate under whatever government system we find ourselves. Some of you reading this book have a calling to be on a board of education or to lead a precinct of your political party. Perhaps you are going to be the next governor, mayor, or council member.

Before any of that can happen, however, you must be, above all else, known as a man, a woman, a student of God. It's a calling! God wants some of His children to serve Him in the political arena. He wants to change the institutions as His children walk humbly and winsomely in holiness. He wants to express His love through you, as you tactfully share what you believe and why you believe it. Let others observe your life and love even when you wholeheartedly disagree with their political perspective. God has worked and will work through committed followers of Jesus. Throughout history, Christians led the way in abolishing slavery, giving women the right to vote, supporting the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties, and now fighting the sex trafficking epidemic of our day.

Many will remember when the Berlin Wall fell, uniting Eastern and Western Germany. The wall fell, but the real story of what happened is a quiet story of believers empowered by Christ permeating the darkness, giving hope, meeting needs, and seeing God change the hearts and lives of the German people. A culture shift began and ended with the wall in rubble.

Can I tell you something? Your city doesn't have to stay the way it is. This country doesn't have to stay the way it is. The change can begin in your neighborhood, your kids, your school, and your community. The change starts with us. When we positively impact our culture by living like Jesus, like the early Church did, we will see God work in our "little world" in the same way.

In Conclusion

In a fallen world, God has a specific plan for transformation. The *Church* gathered is to teach and model truth whether or not the truth becomes the subject of political debate. The *government* is to pass and enforce laws to restrain evil. *Individual believers* are to take personal responsibility to exemplify Christ in the culture by life, word, and resources and engage in the political process as fully as the government allows.

When the roles of the Church, the government, and individual believers become clear and are applied faithfully, we diminish or eliminate a great majority of the conflict and division both inside and outside the Church. Godly Christians will not necessarily agree on non-moral and political issues, but we must take very seriously our citizenship in heaven, and our relationships with fellow Christians must override any of our strong and passionate political views. Unity in the body of Christ takes precedence over our personal political persuasions. Good people can "agree to disagree" with maturity.

For in the end, according to Jesus, they'll know us "by our love," not our political activity.