

## **Jesus Christ, the Ultimate Rorschach Test (for social, economic, and political views).**



When social, economic, and political (SEP) forces hijack Christianity, the name of Jesus is used for all kinds of evil. Throughout history the name of Jesus was used for the marriage of Christianity with pagan Rome under Constantine (313), for the atrocious activities of the crusades (1100-1300), for the chilling inquisitions (1231-1834), for brutal exploitation in colonialism (1400-1800), for racial slavery in antebellum America (1650-1861), for racism in Jim Crow South (1865-1960), for the support of the Nazis (1930-1940), for consumer/prosperity Gospel (1950-2018), and for the Americanized political Christianity on the Right and the Left (1950-2018).

Although Christianity is often blamed for the inexcusable activities during the above periods, the true sources of these evils are financial, social, and political—not Jesus Christ and not His message. Christians did not engage in these activities because of Christ. They did it because of financial, social, and/or political gain in the world (1 John 2:15-16). It seems that the prosperity gospel has always been with us in one form or another.

The Bible speaks of two aspects of Christ's influence: one is vertical and one is horizontal. The vertical is a relationship with God of individual salvation by faith alone in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8-10). The horizontal is the spreading out of the influences of Jesus Christ in society. Jesus described this influence in terms of salt (Matt. 5:13). The influence of salt includes social justice as demonstrated throughout the Bible.

Because there are both individual/vertical and societal/horizontal implications regarding rights, there will always be a conflict between the one and the many in the government of any society. In many areas, conservative Christians tend to emphasize the one (individual freedom) whereas liberals emphasize the many (social justice). The truth is that the Bible teaches both: the importance of the individual (property rights as per "thou shalt not steal") as well as the many (e.g., mandated safety net for the helpless in society, Lev. 19:9-10).

In the inevitable conflict between the one and the many, each side often misrepresents the opposing side with derogatory language. On the Right, the individualist will label any attempt of the government to take any of his property to help the helpless as socialism or communism. Those who are more socially minded will tend to disparage those who have worked hard to accumulate many goods as being greedy and exploitative of fellow human beings. The truth is that each side operates chiefly in mental constructs (idealism) rather than reality as such, especially in light of the fact that there are no such things as pure capitalism or pure socialism/communism in reality. All societies have a mixture of both capitalism and socialism. In fact, this is what we find in the Bible: both the inherent right to private property as well as the right of a government to take from some to give to the helpless (safety net). However, there is a system that is evil and needs to be categorically rejected, namely Marxism--and this is because of its philosophical principles of dialectical materialism.

Historically speaking, in America white conservative Protestants have generally emphasized the vertical personal aspect of Christianity, whereas the black conservative Protestants have emphasized the horizontal. As far as the latter, this is understandable given our nation's great moral sin of racial slavery and denial of basic civil rights to human beings based on the color of their skin.

One of the charges that some conservative biblical Christians (by the way, I consider myself a conservative biblical Christian) make against the horizontal social dimensions of governmental responsibility (safety net) is that this activity must be bad since it is often supported by liberal Americans who are not Christian and have a very low view of the Bible and Christianity. By the way, this a fallacy of logic known as the genetic flaw. Where an idea comes from does not in and of itself make the argument fallacious. The argument, not where it came from, is either valid or invalid in itself. An idiot that claims that  $2+2 = 4$  does not invalidate the truth of that statement.

As far as biblically conservative African Americans who see the importance of the horizontal aspect of society (e.g., civil rights and justice), it is not like they do not take the Bible seriously. In fact, they are generally more faithful to the Bible and the local church than their white counterparts. Note the stats taken from a previous presidential poll:

#### Protestant African Americans vs Protestant White Americans

	Black	White
Believe the Bible is the Word of God . . .	96%	vs 34%
Attend Church 2-3 times a week . . . . .	95%	vs 28%
Read Bible in past year. . . . .	99%	vs 27%

In addition to the divide above, there is a great divide between conservative evangelical African Americans and conservative evangelical white Americans on political issues. How can both black and white conservative Bible-believers believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, His death on the Cross for all men, the infallibility of the Bible as the Word of God, and be so radically different in beliefs about each other and the role of government? How can the same followers of Christ read the Bible and come up with such radically different views on the government? How can the same followers of Christ be so different on social, economic, and political issues?

While there are many reasons for the differences, the fundamental problem is that all too often Jesus Christ becomes the ultimate Rorschach test, where we (both conservatives and liberals) project on Him all our own hopes and dreams as the great affirmer of our desired way of life and protector from all that we have feared.

In sum, the issue for Christians always comes down to a choice between “inviting” Christ into our lives for what we think is a better life (financial gain or civil rights) or acceptance of His invitation to come into His life—His way of doing things, i.e., a life of loving God and loving all others (Matt. 22:37-40; Rom 12:1-2). And Christ’s way of doing things is far different from the way of the world: Luke 9:23, Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

In His Grace,

Pastor Don