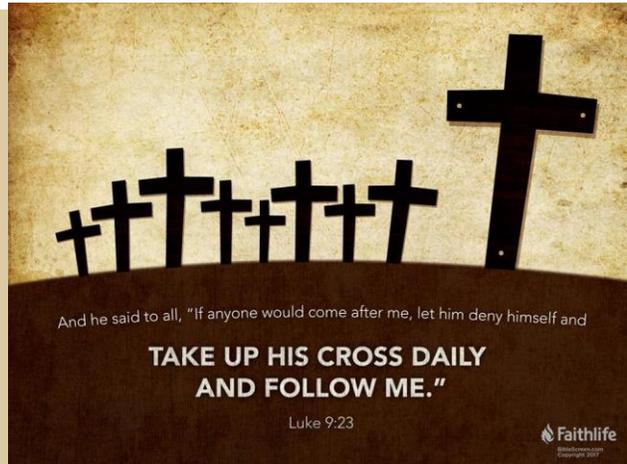


**Christians do not need the help of and
should not place their trust in the State for its mission**



36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.



Christians do not need the help of and should not place their trust in the State for its mission.

As we Americans get ready to celebrate the anniversary of our wonderful Republic's Independence, it is a good time for us Christians to reflect on our mission and relationship with the government.

In previous articles, I have pointed out the disastrous results of the syncretism between the church and the State. I called it the hijacking of Christianity. I have sketched out ten such periods when the State pressed Christianity into its service and how in each period the results have not been good for the church nor the State. The mixing of the church and state resulted in 10 syncretistic monsters: (1) church/Constantine (313), (2) church/crusades (1100-1300), (3) church/inquisitions (1231-1834), (4) church/colonialism/imperialism (1400-1800), (5) church/antebellum Southern slavery (1650-1863), (6) church/reconstruction (1863-1877), (7) church/Jim Crow South (1877-1960), (8) church/Nazi Germany (1930-1940), (9) church/consumerism (prosperity Gospel) (1950-2018), and (10) church/politics—on the Right and the Left (1950-2018).

Instead of the church helping the State be the State by pointing to the need for equal justice for all human beings because all are made in the image of God, the church often aided and abetted the State in its evil. In the above ten periods, it was the church that facilitated the State's exploitation and murderous rampages that claimed tens of millions of lives by "baptizing" its activity with the sanction of being "in the name of Christ." Just think how Christianity actually fueled activity by the State in the above ten periods. For example, it is one thing for the State to try to justify race-based slavery for economic reasons, but when Christians come along saying

that the Bible teaches that Blacks are inferior, should always be separate because God made the races to be different, and cursed Blacks with the mark of Cain/Ham, then the State feels more justified in denying equal status to Blacks by trafficking in these human bodies and souls like commodities (Rev. 18:13).

It is one thing for imperialists to exploit tens of millions of people and rob them of their natural resources, but when Christians tell the State that it is fulfilling the Christian burden to evangelize the heathen, then the State feels more justified, even righteous, in imposing its will on others. It has been estimated that Europeans have decimated up to 90% of American Indians. I wonder how much of that was due to the church's call for the state to fulfill Manifest Destiny. I am not denying God's will for all to hear the gospel, I am denying that God calls the government to further this Christian mission.

All of the above is what happens when Christians forget that the State will always be evil and to get in bed with the State is to destroy the function of the State as well as the Church. Our Kingdom is not of this world, and we do not need the State to fulfill our mission. Is this not what Christ taught and what He testified to when He was arrested for treason against the State (John 18:36)?

As far as our calling to the State, our job is to help the State be the State by reminding it that its primary function is justice. We are to be the conscience of the State with regard to justice. This is a principle that runs through the Old Testament and culminates in Revelation. We are to point out when the State is being unjust to any human being. We are not to get the State to favor us as Christians. We do not need nor want its help in our mission of sharing the love of God for all human beings with the self-sacrificial love and grace of Jesus Christ, who died for everyone.

Consider the marvelous testimony of Christians could have had through history if they had rejected the social/economic/political temptations of the State in the above 10 periods. What if they stood up and said (1) "NO!" to the temptation of becoming the Roman State, (2) "NO!" to the temptation of political power and economic benefits of the crusades, (3) "NO!" to the barbarity of the inquisitions, (4) "NO!" to colonialism in the name of Christ, (5) "NO!" to antebellum slavery and the use of Christianity for the myths of the "Lost Cause" of the South, (6) "NO!" to racism in reconstruction, (7) "NO!" to segregation in jim crow South, (8) "NO!" to Hitler's nationalism and prosperity, (9) "NO!" to the Christian consumerism of the prosperity gospel churches, (10) "NO!" to the hijacking of Christianity by politics. Why did Christians fail to speak against these evils? Where were the Christians? Too many times, they not only failed to speak out against evil, they were partaking of the evil for social, economic, and political benefits. In a word, the church "failed."

God only knows how things could have been different. Certainly, the love, grace, and beauty of Christianity could have brought transcendent light to the world in a way that would be beautiful for God and Christianity, if only Christians would have stood up for authentic Christianity more often instead of their culture. How beautiful it could have been, what a testimony to the love of Christ, if Christians would have rejected the economic and political temptations of the world and chose the love and grace of Christ.

There is nothing we can do to change the past--except never forget the lessons of the past as per holocaust deniers. We only have the present and future. We must avoid putting our trust in the State to help us Christians in any way. The moment a Christian puts his trust in the government is the moment that his Christianity becomes corrupt. I see problems in this today with many so trusting government because it holds shiny promises (e.g., less government regulation, restriction on abortion) that they end up becoming like politicians in hating the opposite side, and what's worse is the watering down Christianity with so much hypocrisy as to make it ineffective and downright ugly. Instead of sharing the love and grace of Christ, many end up showing hate and divisiveness due to social, economic, and political influences and benefits.

Look around and see how Christianity has become so splintered. Surely, the ethics of Christ are not ambiguous or that relative. Why are we not one not only theologically but socially as well? It is interesting to note that the Jews for most of their history was one on social issues up and through the Roman Empire--because they were people who were serious about the Book.

As far as our own times, one reason that abortion and gay rights have become acceptable is that we Christians are not united around the essence or ethics of Christianity. Instead, many Christians are united around social, political, and economic matters. The body of Christ is fragmented.

Look at how political Christians are today. How many will watch cable news all day and never open their Bibles, never attend a local church, never consider the ethics of Jesus Christ--like in Matt. 5:44-48? I am convinced that if I was invited to speak at a number of conservative churches that emphasized economic matters and mentioned that I admired President Obama's faithfulness to his wife, I would be scorned. I am also convinced that if I was invited to speak at other conservative churches that emphasized human rights and mentioned that I admired President Trump's cutting back of regulations, I would be scorned. This scorning would overshadow anything I would say about sacrificially loving God and all human beings with the love of Christ--the central ethic of Christianity.

In fact, I am convinced that if any pastor today taught something that went against a congregation's American social/economic/political views, some people would leave the church—regardless of how orthodox he was regarding Jesus Christ, the Bible, loving all others, and the spiritual life. A pastor could teach an hour on Jesus Christ and say one thing that is not economically or politically correct, and some believers would no longer come back. Why? Because the social/economic/political realms have become more important than Christianity. Instead of the transcendent being about loving God and seeking Whole Truth, the transcendent becomes about one's social, economic, and political preferences. My brethren, this ought not to be so.

There is the better way of Jesus. While we do have a responsibility in helping the State be the State ("justice for all"), our kingdom is not of this world. We have been called to bring the love, grace, and peace of the Lord to all—and that includes one's political opponent. Instead of hating the liberals and maligning them, how about we pray for them and practice Matthew 5:44-48—which, by the way, is the context for being salt and light to preserve any nation.

The better way of Jesus is loving God and people to the ends of the Earth. Unlike the way of politics, in the better way of Jesus, we bring peace (John 20:21-22). Jesus promised peace to His disciples. We Christians have been called to be Christ's witnesses. We are living witnesses for Christ for peace with God and man, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God everywhere we go all over the world. When we live in relation with others rooted in sacrificial love with a view of God's will and what life will be like in Heaven, we have power together to tell a better story of God's grace and love and live out the better Way of Jesus. This is what our Wonderful Republic needs from us more than anything else: Christ's love and grace--and Christians are the only ones that have such a message.

Luke 9:23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself [love God and all others sacrificially], and take up his cross daily [suffer consequences], and follow Me [the Christ-centered life].

In His Matchless Grace,

Pastor Don Hargrove