

Equipping Thoughts for Leaders



January 28, 2020

The impeachment is in full swing and we see Christians bravely (pun intended) blasting the opposition to their political views from the comfort of their devices. Polarization is blazing. One side drinks the “Trump-can-do-no-wrong Kool-Aid” in which obvious things that are problematic are overlooked. The other side has the “Trump Derangement Syndrome”: in which hatred and bitterness causes an ignoring of every potentially positive thing Trump does and buries it beneath his obvious character flaws.

How can leaders help God’s people avoid political pitfalls? I like how the Message Bible paraphrases Paul’s instruction on how God’s people are to respond to government.

Romans 13 1-7 MSG *Be a good citizen. All governments are under God. Insofar as there is peace and order, it’s God’s order. So live responsibly as a citizen. If you’re irresponsible to the state, then you’re irresponsible with God, and God will hold you responsible. Duly constituted authorities are only a threat if you’re trying to get by with something. Decent citizens should have nothing to fear. 3-5 Do you want to be on good terms with the government? Be a responsible citizen and you’ll get on just fine, the government working to your advantage. But if you’re breaking the rules right and left, watch out. The police aren’t there just to be admired in their uniforms. God also has an interest in keeping order, and he uses them to do it. That’s why you must live responsibly—not just to avoid punishment but also because it’s the right way to live. 6-7 That’s also why you pay taxes—so*

that an orderly way of life can be maintained. Fulfill your obligations as a citizen. Pay your taxes, pay your bills, respect your leaders.

You may wonder, “That sounds fine for Paul and the early church, but they didn’t have to deal with our current Liberal/Conservative...Democratic/Republican politicians.” Be careful with that logic!!!

Paul wrote Romans 13 to the church in the capital of the Roman empire. He wrote it just after Emperor Claudius died. Claudius was bloodthirsty, cruel, overly fond of gladiatorial combat and executions, and quick to anger. Claudius even acknowledged that trait and apologized for it publicly at times, but nothing changed. He was such a racist that he banished all-natural Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2).

He was replaced by his great nephew Nero (who was the new emperor at the time of Paul’s writing). History recounts him as a paranoid, crazy man who killed his own mother. He was known for his extravagant building projects dedicated to his personal pride. He ended up burning Rome and blaming it on Christians which launched a wave of persecution (seen in History and in the book of Hebrews).

Paul wrote a similar thing to both Timothy and Titus who were helping local churches during what became the bloodthirsty reign of Nero.

- *1Ti 2:1-4 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, (2) for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. (3) This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, (4) who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*
- *Tit 2:13-3:3 (3:1) Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, (2) to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. (3) For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.*

Then consider what Peter wrote (the guy who cut off the soldier’s ear during the arrest of Jesus) near the time he was put to death under the same reign of Nero.

- *1Pe 2:12-17 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. **(13) Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in***

authority, (14) or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. (15) For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. (16) Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. (17) Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king (ESV Emperor).

There has never been perfect human government, but that doesn't mean God is not involved. One way to look at it is that **God created government, but man created politics**. Probably the biggest angst we face is not government as much as politics. God creates something good (secular government that promotes good and restrains evil) but man tends to corrupt it, despite people's best attempts not to do so. The biggest problem, for sure in our country, is politicians.

I have often said to others that today it seems we have far too many politicians and too few statesmen. A politician is someone who has a primary objective to get elected, and once the election is over to stay in power. A statesman, on the other hand, is someone who has core convictions that they believe deeply are important for the good of the people they serve, and they stay true to those things. They will not compromise, in the bad sense, to obtain, or stay in power. They are interested in the good of others, not the good of their own ego.

A politician will flip-flop on issues for the sake of poll numbers. A statesman stands by his ideals and will do whatever is necessary and will even sacrifice his own popularity to stay true to them.

This does not mean statesmen are so narrow minded that they aren't willing to change methods or negotiate some things but will do so to continue to pursue their core values from a different angle. They may make short term sacrifices for the sake of long-term gains. A great example of this is William Wilberforce (1759-1833) who throughout his long political career went through ups and downs, twists and turns, as he pursued ending slave trading in England. The "Slavery Abolition Act" was not passed until 3 days before he died.

God's Kingdom is Above Politics

God's people can't afford to be swept up in the political wars. We serve a higher King and Kingdom. Our first "citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). When I say *political wars* what I am really talking about is God's people getting caught up in *partisan politics*. Partisan means prejudiced in favor of a cause.

Partisan politics are prejudiced politics. It is when people support half-truths to promote their candidates and tell half-truths to demonize their opponents. A partisan approach will ignore any truth from an opposing side. It ends up creating a caricature of themselves and the opposition, minimizing their own weaknesses and dismissing the best features of the other side.

God's people must live above this and not become swept up in partisan melodrama. Some of God's people who get caught up in partisanship end up becoming angry and bitter towards His people who have differing views towards political issues. This should never be. Even Jesus' followers had different political perspectives among themselves (zealots who were anti-government terrorist and tax-gatherers who took advantage of their own people by aligning with the government).

God's people are to follow Christ and demonstrate the answer to the world's corruption and deterioration. By getting caught up in partisan politics we bring shame upon the cause of Christ.

John Wesley wrote in his journal during a heated political season in 1774 a godly approach towards elections and political partisanship that God's people need to hear today.

I met those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election, and advised them

**To vote, without fee or reward(bribe), for the person they judged most worthy*

**To speak no evil of the person they voted against, and*

**To take care their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side."*

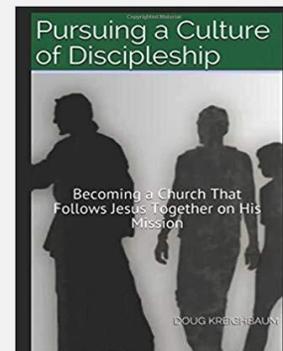
How can leaders help guide God's people to avoid the sin that usually accompanies partisan politics?

- **Remind God's people that there is only one true King, Jesus.** Religious and secular leaders tried to trick Jesus to take political sides by asking, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" Jesus discerned their wickedness and refused. He told them that Caesar's image is on the coin, so give to Caesar what belongs to him, and give to God what belongs to Him (Matthew 22:17-22). Jesus

was careful not to mix up an earthly king with the heavenly King who is the only one to receive our ultimate allegiance.

- **Help God’s people stay clear of religious political partisanship that seeks to put God “on our side” rather than seeking to be on His side.**

- **Call people to remember that Democrats and Republicans, the House and the Senate, are far too small for us to pin our hopes.** The government of the earth rests on the shoulders of the Prince of Peace. As God’s word says, “There will be no end to the increase of His government” (Isaiah 9).



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- **Remind God’s people that our allegiance is to the Kingdom of God, not earthly kingdoms.** Jesus and the apostles spent very little time ranting against the Roman leaders of their day. We have no Biblical verses where they did this. Their peace came from Jesus and His Kingdom. Even Jesus told Pilate, who had earthly power, “You would have no power unless it had been given you from God” (John 19:11).
- **Remind God’s people that the direct Biblical commands regarding our approach to government are to be “praying for, honoring, and submitting to leaders” (the clear command of Romans 13).** Keep in mind that when Paul wrote Romans 13 it was during the reign of the crazy, bloodthirsty Nero.
- **Remind God’s people of Biblical and church history in which, with very few exceptions, Christianity has advanced and flourished most when the state was against Christianity or tried to snuff it out.** It often languished when the state was for Christianity.
- **Remind God’s people that Jesus and the writers of the New Testament said many times that the greatest testimony of Christ through His people is their love for one another (John 13:34-35, 15:12,17,22,1 John 3:11,23,4:7,11,12 etc.).** Do not get sucked into partisan melodrama. Avoid sinful criticism of fellow disciples, especially in public and on social media. It communicates to the world that Christianity is bogus. Unbelievers think, “Wait a

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minute...don't they go to church together...see, the church and Christianity is no better than the life I live." This doesn't mean we can't disagree, but impassioned partisan melodrama before a watching world brings shame on the cause of Christ.

Remember that there is a higher cause in Christ than our political opinions and preferences. Have your convictions but don't use them in a way that discredits the cause of Christ.

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