

**HEADLINES:  
POLITICS AS USUAL?  
JULY 12, 2015**

If you follow the news,

you know we're in a political season of presidential campaigning that seems to last forever.

On the Democrat side there are currently one declared candidate and two or three half candidates.

On the Republican side there are (count fingers) 147 candidates... or something like that.

Let the mud-slinging begin!

Politics as usual, right?

Politics.

It's an interesting word.

Poli-ticks.

Poly, meaning many.

And ticks are blood sucking insects.

So poli-ticks is...

Actually, the word comes from a Greek term, politikos,

which means "relating to citizens" or "to a city."

Politics is the achieving and exercising positions of leadership and governance  
of a human community.

As played out in our form of government,

politics includes the participation of citizens in electing leaders

and then influencing their work

through our the expression of our opinions of how things ought to be.

When it comes to the Christian faith and politics,

a number of declared presidential candidates are talking about their faith and church involvement,

hoping to attract the votes of Christians.

But how much should that matter to us?

---

What about "separation of church and state"?

That is often touted as a constitutional reason for Christians and their churches and even candidates  
to keep their mouths shut about their faith and their politics.

But that's not what the Constitution says.

Here's a little Civics 101:

The Constitution nowhere contains the phrase "separation of church and state."

That phrase comes from a letter written by Thomas Jefferson

to the Baptists of Danbury, Connecticut in 1802,

assuring them their minority faith

would not be threatened by the government.

Notice he said the government would not oppress or interfere with their faith.

He said nothing about influence running the other direction.

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States

includes just one statement about religion:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,  
or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

That's it; that's all.

Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion.

No particular religion is to be made the law of the land.

That is, there shall be no "state church" as in many parts of Europe.

And no religion should receive more favorable treatment from the government than any other religion.

And Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion.

The faith of individual citizens and the faith of particular churches shall not be restrained by law.

(This part is under attack right now.)

So the government is not to promote or restrain any particular expression of religious faith.

Nowhere does the Constitution or any of its Amendments establish a separation of one's faith and politics.

---

In fact, I would suggest that the Christian faith *requires* that our faith inform and influence our politics.

That is established by the earliest and most basic Christian affirmation that "Jesus is Lord."

"Lord," that means the one who is in charge, our leader, our sovereign, our king.

The Bible speaks of Jesus as "the ruler of the kings of the earth," (Re.1:5)

He is the "King of kings and Lord of Lords." (1Tim.6:15; Re.17:14; 19:16)

Jesus is "Lord of all." (Ac.10:36; Ro.10:12)

Those words were written while under the Roman Empire.

They were considered quite subversive in their day.

And they still are.

It has been said that if Jesus is not Lord of all,

he's not really Lord *at all*.

If I get to pick and choose which parts of my life he's going to influence,

then *I'm* the one who's really in charge,

not him.

If Jesus is not Lord of *all*, then he's not Lord *at all*.

If Jesus is Lord of all, Lord of *your life*,

then he is Lord over your *politics*, too.

---

That claim of Lordship is why there is a long history of

uneasy tension between people of deep faith and people with political power.

You can read of it in the Old Testament,

in lives of Daniel, all the prophets, and a woman named Esther.

In John's Gospel, when Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, the one thing Pilate asked was,

"Are you the king of the Jews?" (Jn.18:33)

He had no interest in the religious disputes of the Jews.

He wanted to know the politics of this thing.

"Are you the king of the Jews?"

And because of the threat to political stability,

Pilate went along with the plan to eliminate Jesus.

When he nailed up the placard on the cross to announce Jesus' crime it said,

"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." (Jn.19:19)

But Jesus was not so easy to keep down.

In the same Gospel, a week after Easter doubting Thomas met the risen Christ,

and his response was one of the greatest affirmations of faith in the Bible:

"My Lord and my God!" (Jn.20:28)

Governor Pontius Pilate, King Herod, the Roman Empire, the ruling Jewish Sanhedrin, could not stand against him over the long term.

Today they are all gone,

with their own chapters in books of ancient history.

But to this very day there are millions of people who proclaim, "Jesus is Lord."

Do you proclaim him?  
 Is he truly Lord of your life, ALL of it?  
 The tension with human government didn't go away when Jesus ascended to heaven.  
 In fact, his ascension was viewed as his enthronement as Lord over all creation.  
 And it encouraged his followers to give their lives to him.  
 And sometimes for him.

The enemies of the early church arrested Peter and some of the others,  
 trying to get them off the streets.  
 They held them in custody overnight.  
 The next day they hauled them out,  
 questioned them,  
 and ordered them to not preach Christ any more.  
 Peter responded,  
 "We must obey God rather than men." (Ac.5:29)  
 There's a higher authority than you guys,  
 an authority higher than any human authority.  
 That is who we're answerable to in the end.  
 Not you, but Jesus.  
 Because Jesus is Lord, King of kings and Lord of lords.

That same tension between God and government continued through the centuries.  
 The only times it let up a bit were when the church was unified with the state.  
 The Church became a tool of government coercion.  
 And sometimes the Church used the government  
 to oppress minority religions and doctrines.  
 Not the brightest hours of the Church's history.

But whenever Church and state were separate entities,  
 tension was a regular feature of the relationship.

---

We live in a situation very different from that of the New Testament world.  
 We live in a federal republic,  
 where we have voice and vote to elect and influence many of our government officials.  
 So we face situations and decisions unlike those of New Testament times.  
 Who shall we vote for?  
 What policies and issues ought to matter to us?  
 And what are we to think about them?  
 Because our situation is so different,  
 there is no page of the Bible we can turn to, no chapter and verse,  
 that supplies answers ready-to-go.

But if Jesus is truly Lord of all, he is also Lord of my politics, your politics.  
 So it is a matter of drawing from scriptural principles which we can apply to our current situation.  
 For instance, the general principle of stewardship applies.  
 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.  
 And into the midst of that he brought forth humanity and gave us a task, a responsibility.  
 "God created humans in his own image." (Ge.2:27)  
 "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.  
 Rule over it." (Ge.2:28)  
 Subdue it; rule over it.  
 We are to live out the image of God by being his stewards of his creation.  
 We have a responsibility to manage and shape every aspect of creation,  
 including our human politics,

in accordance with his goal of the Kingdom.  
 If we would live faithfully,  
 withdrawal and uninvolvedness is not an option.  
 Biblical values should find their way into our views on specific issues and policies,  
 like the inherent value of human life,  
 because it is created in the image of God.  
 That says something about the issues of abortion, euthanasia, and racism.  
 The Bible is strong on the ideal of justice,  
 which goes to the necessity of fair trials,  
 appropriate punishments for those convicted of crimes,  
 and the question of what constitutes “cruel and unusual punishment”?  
 There is the biblical value of concern for the poor and needy.  
 Think of retirees, the unemployed and underemployed,  
 who are truly trying but just can’t make it.  
 And that raises the issue of job creation.  
 Jobs where people can make a living and, even more so,  
 where they can live out their God-given purpose of meaningful work,  
 and so find value, worth and meaning in what they do.  
 Biblical values include defending the weak and the oppressed,  
 Which makes me think about persecuted in other parts of the world,  
 and illegal immigrants who might have been fleeing real danger in their home countries.  
 I think of the mentally ill and the homeless.  
 There is the value of the right of private property.  
 Remember, one of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall not steal.” (Ex.20:15)  
 It presumes a right to private property.  
 So what do we do about state and local governments that exercise a  
 “right of eminent domain” to seize privately owned land and buildings,  
 so it can be used in ways deemed preferable by the government?  
 We must think of biblical values like freedom of religious expression.  
 And yes, that does have a biblical foundation.  
 God never forced anyone to have faith.  
 So we must consider how laws  
 might limit someone’s ability to live and work according to their faith convictions,  
 even if we might disagree with those faith convictions.  
 In all of these issues and more we may disagree on the best ways to address them.  
 Should it be a hand-out, a hand up,  
 an elimination of barriers that keep people down, or some combination?  
 But we cannot just ignore the issues.  
 We must bring our faith to bear on them.  
 At the same time we ought to keep in mind the biblical reality of sin,  
 that “ALL people have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Ro.3:23)  
 ALL people, including politicians and government employees,  
 whether they have an “R” or a “D” or an “I” next to their names.  
 ALL have sinned.  
 This is a principle reason why the founding fathers created a government form with  
 separation of powers and the consent of the governed.  
 It’s why the Constitution gives only certain powers to the federal government  
 and explicitly limits the government in some areas.  
 Because all people, even the best of us, are sinners.

And the power of governing authority is a powerful temptation.  
 So we need to be cautious about handing over too much of our lives to the government,  
 concentrating too much power in too few hands.  
 That does not, however, mean the abolition of all government authority.  
 The apostle Paul wrote,  
 “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.  
 There is no authority except that which God has established.  
 The ruler is God’s agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”  
 (Ro.13:1, 4)

In other words, we need human government  
 in order to restrain destructive behavior by sinful people.  
 But an intentionally limited government,  
 as ours was designed to be,  
 to curb the temptations of concentrated power,  
 needs people of a certain character.

John Adams was the second president of the United States.  
 He saw the need for religious values to provide the moral base line for society.  
 He stated in a letter to the officers of the Militia of Massachusetts:  
 “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with  
 human passions unbridled by morality and religion.  
 Avarice, ambition, revenge or gallantry,  
 would break the strongest cords of our Constitution  
 as a whale goes through a net.  
 Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people.  
 It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

Which suggests perhaps the most valuable contribution we can make  
 to the politics of our nation is  
 the shaping of “a moral and religious people.”  
 And a good place to start... is with ourselves.  
 Not pointing fingers at others, but with ourselves.  
 Do I really believe, believe so deeply that  
 it goes to the core of my being,  
 and it shows up in every part of my life?  
 At home, at work, at play... and in my politics?  
 Am I that solidly connected to Jesus as my Lord?

There once was a lightbulb that shone brightly and proudly.  
 It began to strut about,  
 quite unaware of how it could shine like that,  
 assuming it was all due to its own merit and skill.  
 One day the light bulb was unscrewed from its socket and placed on a table.  
 He decided it was time to show forth his glory,  
 so he tried to light up... and tried... and tried. To no avail.  
 Try as hard as he might, that light bulb could not conjure up any light at all.  
 He never realized his light came from a power plant  
 and traveled through that simple connection of the socket.  
 And when it was disconnected... the glory was gone.  
 As we consider the course of our nation and our place in its politics,

let's keep in mind how important is our connection to our God.  
 If Jesus is truly Lord of all, then he's Lord over our politics.  
 Our first political allegiance is not to the Republican Party or the Democrat Party,  
 this candidate or that politician.  
 We are first and foremost citizens of the kingdom of God,  
 and our allegiance is to Jesus.  
 I read of a couple of Baptist churches that decided to make this statement  
 by flying the Christian flag above the U.S. flag.  
 It's a breach of official flag protocol,  
 but it's a great theological statement.  
 We are "one nation UNDER God."

If Jesus is truly Lord of all,  
 it means all those values and morals and beliefs we learned in Sunday school...  
 don't stay in Sunday school.  
 They go with us to the voting booth.  
 Those values go with us when we make a phone call or write an email to a legislator.  
 They go with us when we have a conversation about politics with a coworker at the water cooler.  
 Those values go with us into prayer,  
 as we intercede for those who are in places of governmental authority,  
 those who are trying to get there,  
 and the issues that matter to our faith.  
 And, of course, those values go with us into every other facet of our daily lives.  
 Because Jesus is Lord, Lord of ALL. Right?

**SERMON NOTES:**

Civics 101, separation of church and state

Jesus is Lord (Re.1:5; 1Tim.6:15; Re.17:14; 19:16; Ac.10:36; Ro.10:12)

Tension (Jn.18:33; 19:19; 20:28; Ac.5:29)

How might our faith apply to our politics (Ge.2:27-28; Ex.20:15; Ro.3:23; 13:1, 4)