

Truth **in** Grace

Truth in Grace Ministries

Dr. Dan Hayden, Director

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Don't Americanize THE CHURCH

A Perspective on Politics

Dan's Desk



he church of Jesus Christ is not American. On the other hand, it is not un-American either. It is simply not political.

You may think I'm unpatriotic (or maybe just plain weird), but I have always had a problem with having an American flag in the auditorium of a church. You know—the American flag on the platform in the place of honor at the speaker's right, and the Christian flag in the subservient position on the speaker's left. Quite frankly, I used to see that more in churches years ago than I do today, but that bit of Christian Americanism helps to illustrate a point. Jesus never intended for the church to have a political orientation.

Now don't get me wrong. I love our country and am committed to the American ideals of liberty and justice for all. Furthermore, I am greatly concerned about the liberal agenda in America that is undermining all that our founding fathers intended for our country—precisely because I do love America. When I step inside the church however, I enter an asylum from the political forays of the culture—any culture. Whether it was the Roman government of the early New Testament church, or any other government since then where the church has had a presence, the purpose of the church has been to exalt the Kingdom of Christ independent of any earthly governmental system.

Jesus said, *"My kingdom is not of this world"* (John 18:36) indicating that during the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24) until He comes to establish His Kingdom upon the earth (Rev. 11:15), He is not to be confused with any political system. Pilate understood this and concluded that Jesus was no threat to the Roman government. The church, which is His Body, is therefore, apolitical (non-political). Wherever the church exists in whatever coun-

continued on page 2

try it finds itself, it is a spiritual entity that transcends the political structure around it. Its purpose is to draw people into the transcendent government of Christ, not to transform the mundane governments of men. That is not to say that the church will not have an influence upon the government—it can and it should (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-2 where we are told to pray for government leaders as an influence for godliness). It is to say however, that the church has a higher calling that is both spiritual and eternal (2 Cor. 4:18).

In a political year in which we are electing a new American president, this understanding of the church has important ramifications.

In the World, Not of the World

It is one thing to have the boat in the water. It is quite another thing however, to have the water in the boat. Even so it is one thing for the Christian to be in the world, but it is of great concern when the world is in the Christian. Jesus said that believers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16), so their presence in the world is strategic for the cause of His Kingdom. Yet there are strong imperatives in

the Word of God instructing Christians to not love the world (1 John 2:15-17) and to not be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:1-2). In fact, an alliance with the world and its system is viewed by God as paramount to treason (James 4:4).

So what is the balance here, and how should believers in Christ respond to human government? The answer to these questions is found in the concept of citizenship (see *A Word from the Word*). In Philippians 3:20 Paul makes a strong statement concerning the believer's world view and governmental allegiance when he says, "*for our citizenship is in heaven.*" He says a similar thing to the Ephesians (Eph. 2:19). Conversely, Christians are said to be "aliens and strangers" in the world (1 Pet. 2:11—NAS), which implies that their geographical location is temporary and transient.

Even the promised land was viewed by Abraham as being a temporary arrangement in which he lived "*as an alien... as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents*" because "*he was looking for the city... whose architect and builder is God*" (Heb. 11:9-10—NAS). In other words, as the old song put it, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through."

On the other hand, believers are encouraged by God to show respect to earthly governments. Peter says "*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution*" (1 Pet. 2:13—NAS). Paul put it this way, "*Let every person be in sub-*

jection to the governing authorities" (Rom. 13:1—NAS), and Jesus simply said, "*Render... unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's*" (Matt. 22:21). Wherever Christians live in the world, they are to be obedient to and supportive of their governmental authority. Germans should be good Germans and Russians should be good Russians. As believers in Christ however, both Germans and Russians are to give their true and ultimate allegiance to the Kingdom of Christ.

I have often had opportunity to travel out of the United States. I have been in both Canada and Mexico, several countries of the Middle East, numerous European countries, and the little Caribbean nation of Haiti. In every case I have been conscious of my obligation to be subservient to the laws of each country and to comply with their cultural expectations. I pay their fees and tolls, and I contribute to their economy by spending my money there. But I have never thought of those places as home, and when I was there I always looked forward to going home. In like fashion my citizenship is in heaven, and I look forward one day to going home. In the meantime I respect proper governmental authority, pay my taxes, and pray for peace. I am not *of* this world, but I am *in* it.

Influence for Godliness

Recently Dr. Ed Dobson (Pastor of Calvary Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan) and Cal Thomas (prolific Christian writer) teamed up to write a book entitled *Blinded by Might: Why the Religious Right Can't Save America*. In this book it is argued that the church's desire to influence politics for the purpose of effecting social and moral reform has been misdirected. "Study the teachings of Jesus," they write, "and you will discover that he never intended his disciples to claim or reclaim nations for himself" (p. 170). Their point is that the real power of the church is to see people's lives changed through the preaching of the Gospel, which in turn will have a profound influence on society. It is not the power of politics, they insist, but the power of changed lives by the Gospel of Jesus Christ that will transform a culture. External reform must never be equated with internal transformation. And without internal transformation, there is no true societal change. Only the Gospel can change the heart.

You see, a Christian in politics is wonderful—but the church with a political agenda is unbiblical. As individuals, we have a personal responsibility to vote and to be influential in the world for good; but the church's responsibility is to influence individuals for the cause of Christ. Paul also tells us that we should pray for government leaders in order that "*we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty*" (1 Tim. 2:1-2—KJV). In other words, we should not be indifferent or unconcerned. Having a positive influence for godliness is always high on our priority list.

But mobilizing pastors and churches to engage the political process for moral change, and million man marches on the

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capital have had little effect on the overall decline of our culture. After Bill Clinton was impeached for moral failure, 70% of the people in America still affirmed him as an effective president (*Blinded by Might*, Dobson & Thomas, p. 46). Ed Dobson and Cal Thomas were both active leaders in the Moral Majority and, by their own admission, the influence of that movement when viewed over the long haul, was limited and short-lived.

Think of it. Jesus certainly influenced Pilate (the Procurator was very nervous in Jesus' presence), but He didn't change him, nor did He change the Governor's view of the Jewish people. Herod was even less impressed. Paul had King Agrippa's ear and almost persuaded him (Acts 26:28), but that never truly altered anything with regard to public policy, let alone the King's eternal destiny. It is true that the church has had an influence for good in many cultures over the centuries, but that has come more from the preaching of the Gospel than from being mobilized as a political force.

The church's business is evangelism and spiritual influence for godly living. God never intended, however, that the Body of Christ would be a political structure in the nations of

the world. On the other hand, as Christians get involved in everything from education, to business, to local and federal government, their biblical perspective will certainly have an influence on the system.

In Response to the Election

So what does all of this have to do with electing a new American president? I am writing this article prior to the November 7th election, but by the time you receive it we will already know the outcome. And regardless of who won the election, there will be Christians on both sides of the liberal/conservative spectrum who will be either elated or disappointed. I know for whom I will vote and I have strong feelings about the desired outcome. But that is not the point.

Regardless of whether our government is Democratic or Republican or Independent, my place in the American system will not change. The environment of our culture may alter for better or for worse, but I am still a child of God working and praying for the Kingdom of Christ. My hope is not in George W. Bush or Al Gore, it is in Jesus Christ, "*the King of kings and Lord of lords*" (1 Tim. 6:15). I will pray for our governmental leaders, pay my taxes, and obey the laws of the land. But I am not of the notion, nor ever have been, that politics is the means of godliness. I will continue to preach the Gospel and seek to influence men and women for the cause of Christ as the priority of my life.

So I tolerate politics and endure society, but I remain truly excited about my commitment to the Kingdom of Christ. May God bless America—but if not, my hope remains vibrant in the coming of my Lord. 🙏

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Truth in Grace

Audio Tapes

Here is a current list of all of Dan Hayden's audio tapes. To order any of these teaching tools call 1-800-844-9930.

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All prices listed are suggested donation amounts.

Cedarville Radio Network

Adds "A Word from the Word" to Their Format

Recently I had the privilege of visiting the Cedarville University campus in Cedarville, Ohio to speak for two days in their chapel services with the students. It was an exciting time and I was thoroughly impressed with the quality of education, facilities, faculty and staff of this great Christian institution. The president of Cedarville University, Dr. Paul Dixon, received me warmly and I found myself thanking the Lord for what He was doing through Dr. Dixon's leadership.

As a part of my visit to Cedarville, I had an opportunity to tour the CDR Radio station on the campus of the University and meet a number of the personnel. They have been broadcasting our program "A Word from the Word" since July and it was encouraging to see their excitement for what we are doing. Paul Gathany is the General Manager of the nine stations that comprise the CDR Radio Network, and to hear him tell of the blessings of God upon their radio ministry made me realize what a privilege it is for us to be included in their format. Both days of my visit the chapel message was broadcast live, and later in the afternoon I was interviewed by Chad Bresson for a delayed broadcast as a means of acquainting their listeners more fully with who we are at Truth in Grace. I was reminded again of the many faithful servants of the Lord who minister daily in Christian radio stations like WCDR to proclaim the message of Christ to a needy world.

Thanks again to Dr. Paul Dixon, Paul Gathany and the staff of CDR Radio Network for their willingness to include us in their radio ministry. We are excited to be a part of their programming.

"A Word From the Word"

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Jacksonville, FL	WAYR 550 AM	@ 5:57pm
Brunswick, GA	WAYR 90.7 FM	@ 6:15pm

OUTREACH MINISTRY

The Bible, the Word of God, is alive and well! Using the analogy of the human form, Dr. Dan Hayden is leading an amazing study on the themes of Scripture at the Community Center in Grand Haven, Michigan. The eight-session series has been a blessing to the audience which has been comprised of members of Grace Church as well as residents of the community. Using a multimedia presentation, Dan has woven together an anatomical mosaic of Christ that looks at the Gospels and Acts, the Pastorals and Writings, the Gentile and Jewish Epistles, the Pentateuch and Major Prophets, the Historical Books and Minor Prophets, and five Unifying Systems. Lord willing, we hope to have a video product with an accompanying study guide available next year. Please pray for the continuation and production of The Living Word: A Thematic Overview of the Bible.



The Living Word

A Thematic Overview of the Bible



A Word from the Word

CITIZENSHIP

A Greek city-state was known as a *polis*. The original meaning was close to the idea of “town,” but eventually was used to describe the ruling political center of a district or territory. In fact *polis* became a rather complex word to encompass the whole idea of government, and was therefore a more extensive word than merely “town” or “city.” We get the word **politics** from this word—the art or science of governing a group of people. A **politician** is a person engaged in running the affairs of the *polis*; a **policy** is a reflection of wisdom in governing the *polis*; and **police** are those who control and regulate the activities of the *polis*. As you can see, this Greek word is foundational to many of our English words related to governmental matters.

In like fashion the Greek word *polis* was used by the Greeks as a basis for many other Greek words related to governmental functions. A *politarches* was a civil-magistrate (Acts 17:6,8); a *polites* was a citizen of the state (Acts 21:39); *politeia* was the word used for citizenship (Acts 22:28); and *politeuomai* was a word to describe how people were to conduct themselves as citizens of the state. Then there was the word we are considering here, **politeuma**—a word used to describe the state itself or a commonwealth. The NAS, NIV, and NKJV all translate this word with the English word “citizenship.” The King James used an early seventeenth-century concept and preferred the word “conversation”—how a person conducted himself and spoke as a member of the community.

In the context of Philippians 3:20, Paul is talking about how a Christian ought to live. He speaks of those “who set their minds on earthly things” (v. 19—NAS) as contrasted to the believer in Christ whose “citizenship” (**politeuma**) is in heaven” (v. 20). This is the only place this Greek word is used

πολίτευμα

Phil 3:20

in the New Testament. Therefore it is a significant statement by Paul that Christians do not find their nature, thoughts, and interests in the world, but rather as a reflection of their “homeland” which is in heaven.

Nouns ending in “-ma” in the Greek language usually reflect the results of an action. In other words, how you act is an indication of where your loyalties are. So if you are all wrapped up in earthly affairs, we might assume that your **politeuma** is on the earth. On the other hand, if your thoughts and actions reflect a heavenly perspective, then it will be obvious that your **politeuma** is in heaven. The point is that what you do in your life should be consistent with your citizenship. Paul is saying that our citizenship is in heaven, and therefore how we live should reflect that world view.

So where is your allegiance? For a Christian, living on the earth is like traveling through a foreign country. You respect the government, but your heart is elsewhere and it’s pretty obvious that you are a foreigner. As people observe your lifestyle and see where you invest your energy and resources, they ought to be able to see that you are committed to the Kingdom of Christ. Paul put it this way in another text, “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Col. 3:2—NAS).



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Bits & Pieces

...Dan is currently teaching a Thursday night Bible study at the Grand Haven Community Center entitled "The Living Word: A Thematic Overview of the Bible." Truth in Grace is videotaping this eight-part series and, Lord willing, hopes to produce a video product to be made available through our ministry. Stay tuned.

...*The Gift of Tongues* audio tape series highlighted in this issue of our quarterly publication has been a popular study with the people of Grace Church. Unfortunately, tongues speaking continues to be pushed by the charismatic community as the evidence of Holy Spirit fullness. Dan challenges that concept in this study and demonstrates a more biblical understanding of the place and meaning of this gift.

...Dan will be speaking at the Zion's Hope Conference associated with the grand opening of **The Holy Land Experience** in Orlando, Florida during the week of February 3-8, 2001. For more information on how you can register to participate in this event, call Zion's Hope at 1-800-4-ISRAEL.

...The staff of Truth in Grace extends their best wishes to all of our friends for the upcoming holidays. May you truly be thankful this Thanksgiving, and we pray that you will have a most blessed Christmas and New Year. May the God of truth and grace encourage you in Christ during this holiday season.

TRUTH FOR LIFE

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