

The Christian and Politics

Romans 14:17-19

Mike Hagan

FBC George, October 25, 2020

Introduction

1. We are a week and a couple of days away from our national elections, November 3rd, when we will choose leaders on national, state, and community levels. Each of us will vote to the best of our ability; and we will be thankful we have some say in our governance far beyond some totalitarian or communist countries.

2. I have felt impelled to remind us of some basics as disciples of Jesus Christ living as both Christians and responsible citizens.

- The kingdoms of the world are not the kingdom of God, including the United States. The USA is a relatively good version of the world, but it is still a kingdom of the world and has made some errors and is not the same as God's reign.
- We serve the kingdom of God. We are in the world, but we are not of the world. Our purpose and goals derive from our Sovereign God, not from some party agenda.
- We have been sent into the world to be salt, light, and a fragrant aroma of Christ. We are asked to be faithful to God's agenda.

3. That leads us to our scripture for this morning.

What is the Kingdom of God according to Paul?

1. What it is not – v. 17a.

- It is “not a matter of eating or drinking.”
- In the context, Paul is giving guidelines for gray areas in life (ch. 14), what is right or wrong in areas of life where no clear instruction informs our decision. We can't get much greyer than politics. We need to be “fully convinced” that something is right (5); if not, it is sin (23). We need to not be a “stumbling block” to weaker brothers and sisters (13). We need to walk in love.
- Then Paul says, after all, the kingdom of God is about more than these things. Put in the context of our conversation, the kingdom of God is not about who is elected or not, neither is it about whether you are a member of one party or another. These matters have an importance, like eating and drinking to sustain life, but our kingdom

goes far beyond that. A healthy suspicion of anything that is a version of the world must be our position.

2. What it is – 17b.

- It is a matter of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Let’s unpack this a little more.
- The kingdom is righteousness, or perhaps better, “rightness.” Rightness of character and of actions. This word goes beyond a spiritual content to actions that are right. The question before us is not how we should vote, but how we should live. For that question we look to the scriptures for help and direction. It is only possible by the work of God’s Holy Spirit.
- The kingdom is peace. Peace pertains to a wholeness of life in perfect balance, outwardly and inwardly. No peace appears to exist in our modern world. Real peace is only possible through the Holy Spirit. It starts inside us when we come into relationship to God through Jesus Christ. It grows fully with the Holy Spirit.
- The kingdom is joy. Joy goes deeper than happiness. Total fulfillment and satisfaction light up into joy, leaking out from the disciple through all the pores and penetrating to everything around. And it is only possible with the help of the Holy Spirit.

3. How it is accomplished – vv. 18-19.

- Verse 18 says it comes in service to Christ, leading to acceptance with God and with others. “Service” is a key word in the kingdom. The world’s standard is power “over”; the kingdom of God’s power is “under,” from below, from serving. Jesus said the Gentiles lorded it over them; not so the kingdom of God. Jesus modeled by his servant’s heart. And we serve Christ in our serving.
- Verse 19 tells us to “pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding.” We don’t sit back and watch for peace. We get after it; we run and pursue and persist for peace. The end product should be mutual upbuilding.
- Will a government accomplish it? They can help on one level, but ultimately real peace comes from peace with God. We are asked to serve his goals and pursue peace for mutual upbuilding.

Concluding reflections

Okay, Mike, how does all that inform my vote? How does all this inform who or what I decide in the election?

Remember, I don't offer partisan conversation from the pulpit. God has called me to keep you and myself focused on priorities, the kingdom of God and his righteousness. To these we must be faithful.

But I do think these three weeks provide a background for me as a Christian living in a country where I have a "say" in pursuing what is "good," to use the biblical term, to think through how I will vote. Just keep your eye on the priority, the kingdom of God. In the meanwhile, our political views should be influenced by our Christian faith as long as we understand that our political view is not *the* Christian view.

Think with me on what questions should inform my voting.

1. Ask whether a vote one way or another raises up or makes it easier to serve Christ.

- Paul reminds us that a governing authority serves for good (Rom 13:1-7). As a matter of conscience, we should be in subjection to whoever governs us (13:5).
- I find that we live in a pretty good place where no matter who has been in charge, I still am able to minister as I wish and to serve Christ. Now it comes down to what I think will better serve my call. So, I vote.

2. Ask what the Bible values most and who will make it easier to accomplish those values if they are in charge. I.e., vote your understanding of biblical values.

- Several problems muddy the waters on this reflection. If I believe the Bible teaches clearly on an issue, such as the sanctity of life, rhetoric may say I should vote one way while performance in the past says I should vote the other. So it is on a lot of issues.
- For example, the Republicans include a value of life statement in their platform, but surprisingly abortions always go down under the Democrats who are pro-choice. How am I to decide?
- A second warning needs voicing here. Evangelicals tend to focus on one issue, sometimes two. The Bible addresses all issues. We should value more than one area of concern.

- If we were going to match what the Bible values most as a life issue, it would be the concern of poverty and social justice. The FT and NT teach us our treatment of those who have needs proves to be the measure by which our relationship with God is weighed. The Israelites abused the poor, the needy, the oppressed, and the widows and orphans, taking advantage of their weak position. They were punished for their behavior. James tells us our treatment of them is “true religion” (1:27).
- What other issues should we think about?
 - Racism > related to love for our neighbor and social justice; every person valuable enough that Jesus died for them.
 - Environment > stewardship responsibilities, not economic issue.
 - Immigration > question of love of others.
 - Sanctity of life > life begins at conception > also questions of capital punishment and just war.
 - Family > sex and violence on TV, privileging lust over love; single parent families; children are not born with hate (black youth most hopeless); same sex unions.
 - Education > social justice.

We should never forget that individually and collectively we represent the kingdom of God through loving, Christlike, sacrificial acts of service to others. Prove to be faithful.

Greg Boyd, pastor in the Twin Cities, says it this way: “To promote law, order, and justice is good, and we certainly should do all we can to support this. But to love enemies, forgive transgressors, bless persecutors, serve sinners, accept social rejects, abolish racist walls, share resources with the poor, bear the burden of neighbors, suffer with the oppressed – all the while making no claims to promote oneself – *this* is beautiful; *this* is Christlike. Only this, therefore, is distinct Kingdom-of-God activity” (*The Myth*, 102).