

Politics and Christ's Return

Liberalism and Conservatism

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You have probably noticed that this is an election year in the United States of America. Democrat Vice-President, Al Gore, is running against Republican Texas governor George W. Bush (affectionately known as "W"). Many have commented that it is not that great of a choice between them. The other day, when we were talking about this, Martin Collins said to me that in the final analysis they really advocate similar programs. It is just that the nation will fall faster under Gore. I think that most of us would probably agree with that.

The media are pretty adroit at putting their labels on people and their position. Gore has tried to remake himself time and time and time again. Mostly, he tries to appear as a moderate so that he will get those independent votes in the middle. Anyone with a brain, however, knows that he is a dyed-in-the-wool liberal. Everything he has done in his political career has been liberal. He even chose a Vice Presidential running mate, Joseph Lieberman, a Jew who was the only Democrat in the Senate to stand up and say that what President Clinton did was wrong. However, when it came to a vote, Joe Lieberman voted against convicting him. So he turns out to be not moderate, but liberal.

And then George Bush has tried to position himself as a conservative; but he is more a moderate, when you look at what advocates. So he chose Dick Cheney, who is really a conservative, to be his running mate and to give him "conservative" credentials. Because of the influence of political thought (those of you who even keep any kind of an ear tuned to the political scene in America), you would know that these labels are kind of hard to define. They are ambiguous.

But we even use these labels in the church: "*liberal*" and "*conservative*." Some Christians are "liberal" Christians, and some Christians are "conservative" Christians. At times we look at someone and what they are doing; and we say, "Boy, that seems kind of liberal—the way they approached that." We, probably more often than not, say this in regards to the Sabbath. People have a "liberal" way of approaching the Sabbath, or using the Sabbath. Or they have a "conservative" way. They seem kind of rigid and do not allow themselves to do anything, or enjoy the day. They are just kind of encased in a coffin the whole day.

Well, it is unfortunate that these labels are so ambiguous, because it really messes us up sometimes. We think we know what they mean; but when we must define them, we fumble and

stumble around. We label people with them, and it may not fit them at all.

So today I am going to ask a few questions and, hopefully, answer them. (1) What is a liberal? (2) What is a conservative? (3) Are they appropriate labels for describing Christians? (4) What part should politics play in a true Christian's life? (5) When will the church involve itself in the affairs of the world? (6) Will the church *ever* involve itself in the affairs of this world? I hope to answer a few of these questions today. All of them, I hope, if I can keep my momentum going here and get it all in.

Please turn to Ecclesiastes 10. My sister, Virginia, sent me this verse as quoted from the New American Standard Version. Ecclesiastes 10:2 sounds like a political statement. I am going to read this from the New King James first, and then I will get to the New American Standard Version. Here Solomon says:

Ecclesiastes 10:2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left.

Ecclesiastes 10:2 (NAS) A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.

So, is this a political statement? No, not really. It is one of those quirks of language, actually, that several languages use. What has happened in the evolution of the language is that the word, in that particular language, that means "right" (meaning the right hand, or the right side) has come to mean "correct, proper, good." And the word that means "left" (the left hand, the left side) now means "wrong, bad, weird, strange."

I do not know how many of you know French; but the French word for right, or "to the right" is "*a droit*." Do you know what that word is in English? We pronounce it "adroyt". Someone who is "adroit" is someone who is skilled—someone who is on the ball. He can do things very well.

Now, what is the French word for left? "*Gauche*." If you say, "to the left"—it is "*a gauche*." When somebody is "gauche" he is kind of weird, strange. For example, he wears gauche clothing. Maybe *garish* would be a better word. But we use "gauche" to mean kind of off to the side—kind of weird. Something that we do not necessarily want to be associated with is "gauche."

If you will turn to Proverbs 4:27, this is the true way to look at this. Solomon says:

Proverbs 4:27 Do not turn to the right or to the left; remove your foot from evil.

I came to this scripture because I wanted to set up, right away, that in the church we are neither "rightists" nor "leftists." We are (if I can coin a phrase) "God-ists." He is not in the center. I do not want you to get that impression. But everything He does is true and correct. And so we are not to the right. We are not to the left. So we are not "rightists." We are not "leftists." We are not "conservatives." We are not "liberals," necessarily. We are followers of

God. His way goes neither to the right or the left. It is always correct. It is always proper.

So these political terms—they fit, and they do not fit; because these things (liberal vs. conservative) are approaches, ways of thinking, philosophies, and attitudes in how you approach what is God. And we can then have a *conservative approach* to what is God. Or we can have a *liberal approach* toward what is God. But if we are true Christians, and we are trying to do what is right, and we are staying on the beam—then we are *of God*—godly, righteous, holy. So it is hard to say whether these things are very good at describing what we are, except in our approach to these things—to God's way.

As I just mentioned, liberals have been known for a long time as "leftists." Conservatives have been known as "rightists." Thus, we have a political spectrum—with liberals over on this left end. Then you run over toward the right, through the middle—which is the area of the moderate (which is an area of absolutely nothing, basically). Moderates straddle the fence. And then you go to the right, where you have conservative thought (conservative people).

Why do we call leftists *liberals*, while we call rightists *conservatives*? We need to define these terms before we proceed any further. But we are going to look at them politically. That is, looking at them from the standpoint of the American political scene. However, I do not want you to get all involved in that. I want you to think of it in terms of Christianity. But we are using the situation of American politics so that we can get an idea of this approach.

If you look up *liberal* in a dictionary, it will have these basic meanings: Generous. (That sounds good, does it not? But it goes all down hill from here.) Loose, is the next term. Broadminded. (That sounds okay, until you find out what "broadminded" means.) Not bound by tradition or orthodoxy. That is a good definition of liberal. Generous, loose, broadminded, not bound by tradition or orthodoxy.

Politically, this term represents people who advocate what I have narrowed down as three basic tenets—three basic ways or principles that they function on. These three categories are (1) philosophy, (2) economics, and (3) social.

So, the first one: philosophically they believe that all ideas are equal. That is their basic philosophy—all ideas are equal; and none are absolutely true.

So, if you believe in Buddha and I believe in God, philosophically then (according to the liberal mind) your belief in Buddha is just as good as my belief in God. This is what it means by broadminded—meaning that you would include within your mind all the possibilities of the way things could be. So philosophically they believe that all ideas are equal and none are absolutely true, or that one has any kind of preeminence. Remember that we are looking at this from the American political standpoint.

Secondly, economically they believe in government-controlled redistribution of wealth through taxing achievers (which they often term "the rich") and giving entitlements to non-achievers (or what they call "the underprivileged")—meaning they steal.

That is the basic economic belief of a liberal. You steal from the rich and you give to the poor. It is the old *Robin Hood* philosophy. Not that the rich are rich because they earned their wealth, and have a right to enjoy it; they have also a responsibility to give to the needy. They believe in an outside power (the government) taking from them and giving to others, just because.

Thirdly, and this is where the rubber hits the road, socially liberals believe that nothing should constrain the individual in living as he wants to live. Do whatever you would like to do. Socially they believe that nothing should constrain the individual in living as he wants to live. "*Be free, man.*"

Those are the three basic tenants of the liberal in America. Certain catch phrases and attitudes identify a liberal. Here is one: *Our intentions are good*. It does not matter what the results are. If their intentions are pure and good, then it does not matter how a certain thing ends up. Just so they can feel good about what they wanted to do. Another one is: *Live as you please, as long as it doesn't hurt anybody*. You can have consensual sex in your own home with another person of the same sex and "just so long as it doesn't hurt anybody else, it's okay"—according to the liberal mind.

Liberals stoke class envy. They pit the rich against the poor. Another thing that they do is that they say *diversity is good*. I am not talking about this in a racial way or anything like that; but that diversity of ideas and concepts is good—which is not the case. God does *not* promote diversity in ideas. There is His way, and there is the wrong way. And here is a liberal religious one: *All roads lead to heaven*—which is basically saying the same things as "diversity is good" but in a religious context.

Now, let us go to the *conservatives*. This one sounds pretty good. The basic meaning is "preserving." That sounds good, does it not? It can be, as long as what you are preserving is good. Another one is "traditional." That sounds good too—as long as the tradition is okay. "Cautious" sounds good too—unless what you are cautious about is the truth, or what is right. "Orthodox" is another one, and that is good—as long as you are 'orthodox' about what is truly orthodox according to God. And, last one is "unyielding" which is another one that can be both good and bad. You could be unyielding on something that is absolutely wrong.

The tenants of conservatives in America are (1) philosophically they base their ideas on a code. Whatever it happens to be that they base their ideas on—it does not matter what it is—they do base their ideas on a code (whether it is a code of law, a code of honor, a code of whatever it

happens to be). And this code, they believe, is inviolable. In America, normally, that code is the Constitution of the United States.

Economically, conservatives believe (2) in individual excellence and achievement. Those who succeed should enjoy their rewards, and those who do not achieve should get to work. This tends sometimes to be, in its extreme, somewhat cruel—where there is no mercy, no help for those who maybe are truly underprivileged.

Socially, this is why nations under conservative government tend to do better than under liberal government—because their social ideas are better. Socially, conservatives believe in certain universal standards and values in both public and private. Whether they are traditional American values, or whether they are biblical values, in America the more biblical people tend to be conservative in their political outlook. And, like I said, this makes for a much more stable society when there are certain standards and values that are followed. Even if they are not necessarily the proper ones, at least it is more stable than the other way (where anything goes).

So I am not giving the conservative side of things an A+ in any way, because conservative ideas taken to an extreme are just as bad as liberal ideas. It all depends upon the philosophy that undergirds them—the religion, let us say.

The catch phrases that conservatives are often identified by include "constitutional"—anything having to do with the Constitution. They tend to be moral. Remember that not too long ago, Jerry Falwell had the Moral Majority, which was a rightist conservative religious political group. "Ethical." It was the conservatives that mounted the charge against President Clinton for his lack of ethics.

"Standards" is a big watchword with conservatives. They believe in educational standards. They believe in social standards. They believe in the gold standard. But remember what I said—that their philosophy is that there is a code that they base things on, and that code is inviolable. And so conservatives tend to have high standards.

They also believe in downsizing government. Liberals tend to be the other way, they like bigger government. Conservatives want smaller government. Constitutionally, you can pretty much catch a conservative at his dirty business because he will talk about "original intent." He will go back to the framers of the Constitution. He will go back to the Federalist papers. And they will argue from the original intent of the Constitution, and the thinkers and the founders of this nation.

You will often hear conservatives talk about returning to "the good old days." That is, the way it used to be—because, remember, they are traditionalists. They are people who believe '*the way it was*' was better than '*the way it is*.' Another one is that they believe in "personal

responsibility."

Sometimes this is taken to the extreme, where it is all personal responsibility and no responsibility to one's brother. The "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" type of attitude.

Liberals are also called "progressives." You may have heard that term bantered about. The reason for this is that they advocate change for the betterment of mankind. They want progress for man. When you get down to it, it is really an evolutionary thought—that man is good, and he can just get better. It is humanism at its rankest—that man is always getting better and better. He is progressing. He is going up the chain (not down). He will always be on the top, and he can only get better. That is why they are called progressive.

In turn, conservatives are called "traditionalists." (I mentioned this before.) They support maintaining either the status quo (which means, the way things are) or reverting to a historical standard. This is why you will hear people in the media call liberals a forward-looking people, or party, or group, or organization—because they are always thinking that things are going to get better and better. While they often sneer at conservatives—because, they say, they are living in the past. They want to take us back to 'the bad old days.' "It was not much better then than it is now," is often the liberal argument. "If we go back to the way it was then, then such-and-such, or so-and-so," will be the case.

These labels are only partly true, when you get down to it, because no one (no person, no organization) is completely liberal. And no one, and no organization, is completely conservative. So we just have to take them generally. For the most part, we in the church tend to think ourselves *conservative*. That is, more conservative in our outlook, in our attitude, although we tend to be *liberal* in terms of being generous.

And we also tend to be forward-looking. Are we not looking for the return of Christ and His bringing the Kingdom of God, and us being in the first resurrection and being very God? Is that not forward-looking? Does that not have a tinge of *man can only get better?* (In a way.) Certain things have to happen. Man has to be changed—from mortal to immortal, and corruptible to incorruptible. But somebody looking at us from the outside could consider us a mix of conservative and liberal, from the way that we approach things.

In the eyes of the world, we are really a strange blend of these two approaches to life. A liberal might say, "Well, they can't be conservative because they rejected the tradition and the orthodoxy of this world." We are not Protestant. We are not Catholic. We have rejected the orthodoxy of the religious thinking of this world. When you come down to it, we are weird—because we do not fit these categories very well.

Let us go to II Corinthians 6. This will probably show you, in one short section, why we do not

fit. We will start in the middle of verse 16, where the quotation begins. Paul was quoting Ezekiel here; and he says:

I I Corinthians 16b-18 As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

What this tells us is that we are a distinct people altogether. We do not 'fit' the mold. And we *should not* 'fit' the mold of this world. We are different. We are set apart. The standards, that the world and its people judge things by, do not apply to us. We cannot be put in a cubby-hole because we are distinct, separate. We have come out of the world, and we now belong to our Father in heaven.

It says here that God has separated us from the world. This means that He has done this to accomplish His purpose in us. He cannot do that by leaving us as part of the world. It would not work. He would never accomplish it, unless He removes us. As it says there in Colossians 1, He has "translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love."—meaning we have been spiritually transported into a different sphere altogether. We are separate, distinct, different. We do not 'fit' the category of this world.

And why are we separate and distinct? He says that we *must be* separate for Him to receive us. Did you notice that? "Come out from among them and be separate. . . .do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." We *must be* separate in order for us to be received by Him. Remember that it says back in Isaiah that He will not have anything to do with sin. He keeps it more than just an arm's length away. We have to be different and holy before He will receive us. That is accomplished, then, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. By Him, we are made clean and able to approach the Father; and then He receives us.

But that whole process—of redemption and forgiveness—is accomplished by another, by Christ; and then it begins the process of bringing us out of this world totally. As soon as we have that distinction, we are separate. We are no longer part of this world. So these labels do not necessarily fit us totally.

Let us go back to John 17. This was Christ's prayer before He was arrested. He makes some interesting statements here about this very thing. We will cut into the middle of His prayer, and being reading in verse 9. The *New King James* calls this section "Jesus Prays For His Disciples." That is you and me.

John 17:9 "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have

given Me, for they are Yours.

Did we not just say that? Christ's sacrifice allowed us to be the Father's?

John 17:10-11a And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world [meaning, we are physically left in the world]. . .

By this point, Jesus had totally devoted His will to God. So it was as good as done. He said to His Father, "I'm out of here. I regard Myself as already sacrificed. This will occur."

John 17:11b-15a . . .and I come to You. Holy Father, keep [guard, sanctify, watch closely, watch over, preserve] through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. [Meaning, unified—with God and with each other.] While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and [Look at this.] the world has hated them because they are not of the world [They are distinct, separate, in a different category.], just as I am not of the world. [And we know what happened to Him, and the things He suffered because He was *not of the world*.] I do not pray that You should take them out of the world.

The last I looked, I was still living *in the world*. But at the same time—because I have been consecrated to this, sanctified, set apart by God through Christ—I am no longer *of the world*, though I live in it.

John 17:15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.

He left us here—*in the world* but not *of the world*—and He asked His Father that, because of that, the Father would keep us safe from Satan. Watch over us, from the snares and the wiles of the Devil because we can still be pulled *out* of this special category, and back *in* to the world, if we do not do things properly. Or if we give up, and if we make too many mistakes, so that repentance is no longer available to us. There is always that possibility. If we are not watching, praying, and doing the things of God, doing the things that He wants us to do (if we are not striving for the resurrection of the dead or the Kingdom of God and His righteousness)—then all of these things could slip through our fingers.

He mentions it again in the next verse.

John 17:16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

He really is stressing this—getting it across to us, that *we are different!* We may be living here; but we are a totally separate fish altogether, than the other fish in the sea.

John 17:17 Sanctify them [set them apart] by Your truth. Your word is truth.

Is that not what makes us different? God's Word! Remember that I said that God's way is neither to the right nor to the left. It is God's Way. And that is what sets us apart, because we are the only ones in this world that are actually doing it. And so we do not fit their categories. (Not perfectly.)

John 17:18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

The implication is: as He did, so must we do. Peter said that Christ is our example. We should follow in His steps. Just as He was *in the world* and the world hated Him, so are we *in the world* and the world will hate us.

Now, all this (that I have just said) does not mean that we have not brought the world's approaches with us into this separate place, into this separate category. Unfortunately, we are still worldly in many areas. All of us are still "carnal." Try the hat pin trick, as Mr. Armstrong use to say. If it hurts, you are still fleshly. And if you have got flesh that means that you are still carnal—because that is what the word means.

We still have the pulls of the flesh. And, as much as we try to overcome them, we all have weaknesses and we 'give in' every once in the while. We all have brought into the church, from the world, these approaches to life—conservative, liberal, or what have you. It takes an entire lifetime (our whole conversion process) to begin thinking—not as a conservative or a liberal—but *like* God. It is a totally different way. God is not a conservative. God is not a liberal. God is holy. And that is the way that we have to begin to think.

Mr. Armstrong wrote about the liberal approach, back in March of 1979, in the *Good News* magazine. If you want to read it, it is a very good article. It is called "What Is a Liberal?" And it was the reason why, a few months back, I began thinking about giving this sermon. He was concerned about how liberalism was destroying the church. This was just after he kicked Garner Ted Armstrong out, and took the church back over. It was after his heart attack, and he was beginning to use that phrase that we all remember: *To put things back on track*. They had gone liberal over the intervening years while he was gone 300 days, or so, on the world trips that he was taking.

So he wrote this article to the church in the March, 1979 *Good News* magazine (pages 3, 23-25) to get us to identify liberalism. Probably not just among the ministry, because that was where it was probably most visible—in the ministry and the doctrines that were being taught. But it also affected the membership. The membership was liberal as well, in many cases. So Mr.

Armstrong, I am sure, had to write this article so that we would begin to see it for what it was.

I have snatched some quotations out of this article, because several times throughout the article Mr. Armstrong defines *liberal*. But he defines it in different ways, so that we could begin to get an idea of how a Christian could have a liberal approach.

The liberal wants to water down the truth of God and go as far into this world—which means as far in Satan's way—as possible and still get into God's Kingdom. The liberal is one who has a DIFFERENT APPROACH to questions of human conduct than God.

Now, that is a very broad one. If you think differently from God about how you should act, then you are *a liberal*. That is pretty plain and simple.

The liberal has deceived himself! I do not believe the liberal realizes his own attitude. . . He doesn't want to [obey God], unless he can see beyond any of his arguments there is a specific LAW compelling him to [obey].

He does not want to obey God unless he can see beyond any of his own arguments that there is a specific law compelling him to.

That is very interesting. "If it's not written in a 'Thus saith the Lord' manner, I'm not going to do it." That is what he just said. That is how a liberal approaches things. "Let's see. I'll just go through my Bible here. Ah, it doesn't say a thing about smoking in here. Ha, I can smoke!" But Mr. Armstrong said, "No, you can't. It's a sin. And this is why. . ."

Okay, back to Mr. Armstrong's article: "It never seems to occur to the liberal mind that CHRIST will solve our problems, and we do not have to go contrary to HIS ATTITUDE." The liberal is one who wants to take things into his own hands, and to solve the problems for himself. The calendar is one of these things. The liberal mind wants to solve the calendar problem before God does. That just occurred to me, that that is true.

The liberal wants to see how close he can come to the precipice without falling and losing his eternal life.

"Okay, let's see. Just right here on the edge—we can do it. We can do it. We won't fall in. God will forgive me." That is very dangerous. One little slip. . .

Like Mother Eve, they use HUMAN REASON to justify straying partly away from the SPIRIT of God's law.

That is an interesting one—using human reason to justify straying. Logical arguments that may not necessarily agree with what the Spirit of God says. Just because something is 'logical' does not necessarily mean that it is godly.

Here is another one: "He wants to keep the law in the strict letter, but not in the spirit!" Ah, there is one for you. It is very similar to the one about if there is not a specific law compelling him to obey then he will not obey. This one is that the liberal wants to keep the law in the strict letter, but not in the spirit.

"The liberal is not hungering and thirsting after RIGHTEOUSNESS!" He does not want to necessarily know what is right. He just wants to do what he wants to do. And the more he "knows," the less he can do! So he would rather not *know*. The result is that he does not hunger and thirst after God's righteousness. He would rather starve—because, in his ignorance, he feels he can do more.

Now, Mr. Armstrong catches the essence of *the liberal mind* in both the church and the world. The liberal will do what he wants to do unless forced by a specific direct law to do something else. When it comes down to it, *liberalism* is the way of absolute unrestrained freedom and self-absorption. "I'm going to what I want to do. I'm free to do whatever I think is right." He presumes there to be 'no law,' *unless* he can read one that exactly covers his situation.

As Mr. Armstrong has said, he functions according to 'law' only—not by principle. Principle is a very dangerous thing to a liberal, because it is restrictive. Principles cover much wider areas than laws. Principles give you an idea of how to apply a law in a situation that is not necessarily specifically mentioned.

And thus we have the smoking example. The principle, as Mr. Armstrong said repeatedly, is "Does it show love?" He said, "Does it show love to yourself?" [Cough, cough.] No. It does not. You might get lung cancer or some other kind of cancer. Does it show love to neighbor? No, it does not. We have found out the problems of second-hand smoke. And some of that may be worse than first-hand smoke. Besides that, it is dirty. It does not even look cool, when you come down to it. "What's that thing sticking in your mouth?" "It's burning! Put it out! You might burn yourself." Seriously, smoking violates every principle in the Book. It surely does not honor and glorify God—which was the last one, the clincher. It is not something that Christ would do.

Have you ever wondered why we have so many laws in America? If you took all the laws and all the law books and put them end to end, I do not know how far they would reach; but you could probably pave a good size airport with them! And they pass, seemingly, hundreds of laws every session—not just in the United States Congress, but in each state legislature, and in each city council, and in each school board meeting, each county council. We just have laws coming out the wazoo. Who could ever know even a portion of them? This is the liberal mind in action.

Remember what Mr. Armstrong said about the liberal mind. He wants a law that covers every specific, individual situation. And so, if something comes up and we do not have a law about it,

all these lawmakers scurry to their legislatures and say, "Ah, we need a law that covers this situation." Not that we have a Constitution with the principles in it that should cover that situation. No, we have to make a specific law for this one specific crime that may, or may not, ever happen again.

Our judges are no longer really judges. They are interpreters of the law. That is the only thing they have to go by. Unless you get to the Supreme Court, they really cannot make judgments according to principle. And, even in the Supreme Court, they are dragged down by precedent. So we have a law—Roe vs. Wade—that has been on the books for nearly thirty years now; and it is precedent. And judges are terrified to even consider overturning it, because we have freedom of choice in this country (not to mention that it is murder).

So they have to make laws that cover loopholes—which cover small, miniscule circumstances that anyone with a very good mind could really apply a principle to, and come to a proper decision. And we have a whole bunch of trial lawyers who make this even worse; because, if there is not a specific law to cover it, they can weasel their way around to getting an acquittal for an obvious criminal (or, lawbreaker).

Let us apply this to Christianity. Did you notice that Mr. Armstrong's definition of a liberal in all its various guises covered both (1) *licentiousness*—which is what we normally consider "liberalism" (that is, somebody who feels that he has license to do whatever), and (2) *pharisaism*. Did you catch the connection between licentiousness and pharisaism? The connection is that they are both liberal approaches to God's way.

Wow! How can he say that? Are not the Pharisees ultra-conservatives? Not on your life! They are liberals in conservative clothing. They want to appear to be conservative. That is why Christ called them hypocrites. They were trying to let everybody know that they were righteous and pure, while inside, He says, they were like men's graves. Totally defiled!

The *licentious* person wants to live free of constraints. And so he will do something that a Pharisee does not do. He waters down the law, and feels free to decide for himself in any area that no specific law covers. So if there is nothing in the Bible about visiting a nude beach (And there is not.), well, the licentious person would say, "The Bible doesn't say. So I can make this decision for myself." Not to mention that there are whole chapters in the book of Leviticus that talk about uncovering your nakedness.

What about a *Pharisee*? He is very similar. A Pharisee eschews principle. Do you know what the word "eschews" means? It means he avoids it. A Pharisee eschews principle in favor of the letter of the law and he feels free to add his own laws to cover every little variation or situation. Therefore, he will give himself permission to do as he desires. A Pharisee will just make a law

that will allow himself to do it!

There is no difference. He does what he wants to do, just like the licentious person. The Pharisee just makes it appear like he is being righteous. One is just stricter than the other is, but they are both *liberal approaches*. They both do what they want to do. One just cloaks it in terms of law keeping—which is a very interesting way to look at things, because the 'law' that they are keeping is not God's. It is their own.

What did Christ tell the Pharisees that they did? They magnified their tradition over God's law. They put burdens on people; and they did this by making little, stupid laws—600 and whatever it was, for the Sabbath alone! That you could not carry more than three barley grains—or something like that. If you carried a needle, you were working on the Sabbath. It made them appear so wise; but they gave themselves license to do other things that were totally wrong.

Let us go to Luke 11. We could have gone to Matthew 23, but I thought this account is a bit more concise in the matter. These are the "woes" against the Pharisees, but from Luke's point of view.

Luke 11:37-38 And as He [Christ] spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner.

You see, this was one of the things that they did. They saw the washing laws and regulations, there in Leviticus, and things that they had to do; and they added to them, in order to appear righteous.

Luke 11:39 Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness.

Did you notice? That is a liberal thing. They made the outside clean. They made it look like they were righteous. But inside they were full of greed and wickedness. It was a conservative cloak hiding a liberal way of looking at things.

Luke 11:40-42 Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."

That is just like Matthew 23: 23, but said in a little bit different way. Here they were appearing to be such conscientious tithers; but they would not lift their finger to help their fellow man. They would not give justice, and they would not show the love of God to anyone—which are far

more important than tithing of the mint and rue and all manner of herbs.

Luke 11:43-44 Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greeting in the market places. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them.

This one is interesting. What the Jews used to do was paint the graves and the sepulchers of people white. Remember that Jesus called them whitened sepulchers. The reason that they did this was because they said it was a defilement if you stepped on a grave. And so they wanted to make sure that they marked all the graves, so that you could not—by accident—step on a grave and be defiled and have to wait until the evening (like it says back in the Old Testament).

But what Jesus said was, "You are like these graves that are invisible; and men come and step on you, and they are defiled." If I may put that in terms of this sermon, what He is saying is "Your *liberalism* is invisible. And when people try to follow you (that is, your example) and to do what you say, they become defiled—inside. They become just like you."

In Matthew 23, He says, "You go and get proselytes, and make them more sons of hell than you are." That is the same thing that He is getting at here. They were such hypocrites, and they hid their sins so well. And they brought other people into it, by their seeming righteousness; but they made people even worse than them. And verse 45 is funny—as these lawyers are just asking for it.

Luke 11:45-52 Then one of the lawyers answered and said to Him, "Teacher, by saying these things You reproach us also." And He said, "Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation. Woe to you, lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered."

What is "the key of knowledge" that He is talking about, that the lawyers took away? Remember that the lawyers were the ones that made all the picky little rules. What is the key of knowledge? My answer is the spirit of the law! The key of knowledge was *applying biblical*

principles. If you want a more general way of looking at it, you might say it was true understanding of God and His way.

But the lawyers, with all their picky little laws, destroyed this key of knowledge. Instead of applying principles, they applied all of these picky little laws and forgot how to apply God's way in any situation. They denied it to these people. They got them thinking wrongly on God's way. Rather than applying the spirit of the law, they applied these little picky details and 'lost themselves' from God's way.

Luke 11:53-54 And as he said these things to them [They did not get it.], the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things, lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him.

It went right over their heads. So we can see their liberalism from these denunciations. They loved "form" over substance. They wanted to look good; but they did not necessarily act properly.

They lived according to the letter of the law. They caused others to be defiled. "Sure, go ahead. Come on in. The water is fine." And people followed them into their sin. They made many burdensome laws; and here, at the end, we see that they even justified murder.

They justified killing the prophets—and Jesus Christ, eventually. In their liberalism, they considered the murder of Jesus Christ to be acceptable and justifiable according to *their* way and approach of looking at the law of God. Supposedly, He was a blasphemer because He made Himself equal with God. That is a totally liberal approach to the law of God. They made their own rules. That is what they did.

These final two verses [Luke 11:53-54], as well as all the persecution of Christ and all the saints later on and the martyrdoms—especially when they used the political process to cause these persecutions and martyrdoms—shows the Pharisees and the lawyers to be political creatures. And it shows me, very clearly, that religion and politics do not mix at all—because *in weak liberal men, political expediency trumps righteousness every time*.

It is much easier to compromise and to get along, rather than to stand up for what is right—to stand up for principles. Politics is almost always about compromise, and God's way does not compromise one inch on its principles. A person who is truly living God's way could never function in government (not the way it is today).

Let us go to Philippians 3 and begin to wrap this up. This is the "our citizenship is in heaven" section; and it is full of principles of why we stay out of politics, and voting, and serving on juries, and serving in the military. If you really want to get a good grip about why we do not do

these things, read Philippians 2, 3, and 4. He lays the groundwork in chapter 2, basically, with the idea that we are to have the mind of Christ. That starts the whole ball rolling. Once we understand that we have been called to have the mind of Christ ("Let this mind be in you, which is also in Christ Jesus."), then all these things just logically follow after it.

Chapter 3 begins talking about the fact that Paul had given everything for Christ. And then, he goes on to say that everything that he had—physically, in the world—he counted as rubbish. It did not compare at all to his calling and to the opportunity that God had given him (to be in His Kingdom, to know God, and to be part of the first resurrection). And so he says (in Philippians 3:12-16) that his whole time and energy and everything that was in him was focused on striving for the goal. And then he says:

Philippians 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example [meaning, in pressing toward the goal with all you have got], and note those who so walk [meaning, give regard to them and follow their example as well], as you have us for a pattern.

That is the thing that we have to do. That is what we are here for. That is why God called us out and made us separate. So that we can devote our entire energy and time to this task—to this purpose.

Philippians 3:18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

They have fallen by the wayside and become enemies, because they did not so walk—with wholehearted devotion.

Philippians 3:19 Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their minds on earthly things.

That is a big clue as to why they fell, because they were not pressing toward the goal with their minds in heaven, as it were. They set their mind on earthly things.

Philippians 3:20-4:1 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

That is our job. We have been called out of this world to keep our mind in heaven, on heavenly things—and to stand fast. Can you imagine doing these things while worrying about the politics of this world? It is not our job. We do not have time for it, because we are consumed with knowing God and being in the resurrection. "If by any means," Paul says, "I may attain the

resurrection of the dead." "I'd do *anything* to be there," he says. "Whatever it takes, whatever God requires of me. I will even partake of the sufferings of my Lord Jesus Christ, to be able to know Him and to have His reward." We do not have time for this.

So he makes these points. (1) Setting our mind on earthly things (That is, trying to make this world work.) will quickly descend into idolatry. He says, "Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly (meaning, self-satisfaction), and whose glory is in their shame, and they set their mind on earthly things." It would become a god to them. It would pull those who would do such things away from the true God.

(2) Our nation is heaven—the Kingdom of God. Remember that I mentioned Colossians 1, about being translated into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. We do not belong here. We are here, but this is not our country of origin. Abraham sought a city, a heavenly country; and so do we, because he was the father of the faithful. So we have no business getting involved in another nation's things—another nation's priorities, another nation's activities. That is treasonous at worst (meddling with another government), or at best it is a conflict of interest—because we are not of this world. We are not of this nation. We are of God.

(3) When everything is boiled down, our job is to stand fast in the Lord; and intimate contact with a government makes that extremely difficult. Interestingly, God has not put His people in high governmental positions in the New Testament era—because we are not *of* a nation of this world, as it was in the Old Testament. Daniel, for instance, was a Jew representing the kingdom of Judea in the government of Babylon and in Persia. We do not work that way anymore. We would be a fish out of water. Our Savior Himself mentions this, and it is very important.

John 18:33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

Now notice that Jesus does not deny this at all, but He asks him a question in the meantime.

John 18:34-35 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? [Am I supposed to know these things?] Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"

Jesus answers the question directly.

John 18:36-37 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. [You say perfectly, correctly. Yes, I am a king.] For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world,

that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.

And He might as well have said, "Anyone who is of the truth and hears My voice, is of My Kingdom. They are My subjects. They are My servants, who would fight if My kingdom were of this world. But it is not from here, and it is definitely not now." Jesus is very explicit here. Since His Kingdom is not of this world, His servants are not allowed to fight its battles. He restricts it. He says, "No! Don't get involved with this world's fights—not even to save Me." (Of course, it would have been a puny resistance, because all His disciples fled.)

He does not want the help of puny men in His fight. When Christ comes back to fight, He is going to have a whole bunch of Gods to help Him. (His own brothers and sisters.) That is when we will fight. Right now, we submit—just as our Savior did. We are not *of* this world, just as He was not of this world. As His servants, we are still *not* to become involved in its systems—political, judicial, military, or what have you. We are separate, distinct, different, holy, set apart by God Himself to fulfill His purpose.

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Our battles right now are not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. That is where we fight today. But Zechariah 14: 1-5 says that Christ will come down on the Mount of Olives, on the Day of the Lord; and with Him comes His saints—and they will fight.

Revelation 19:11-15 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God. [Guess who that is.] And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean [symbolizing the righteousness of the saints], followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

He is going to come back mad for the way this world has treated the earth and one another. And He is going to have, backing Him, a glorious righteous holy army.

Revelation 19:16 And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

This is the time when the saints get involved with the government of this earth. Our political term has not yet begun. Not until Christ returns and establishes His rule on earth, and His

government on earth. Then, and only then, will we be righteous, and holy, and spirit enough to handle any situation that comes up. Until then, we are weak and feeble and not able to effect any change, because our battles are not flesh and blood. They are spiritual.

Next week, I am sure we will hear more about Christ's return—because that is a great deal of what the Feast of Trumpets is about. But today I hope I have given you something to think about in terms of liberalism basically—and what a scourge it can be when it is in the true church. We should strive to be neither conservative nor liberal in order to become involved in the politics of the world—because we are separate, and we live the way of God. As Paul said in Philippians 3, now our time is focused on knowing God and attaining the first resurrection.