

The Christian Citizen
February 23, 2020

This past Monday was a holiday for most of us, one from our history as a country. We have much to celebrate as a nation. There is much of which to be proud.

But there are dark clouds on the horizon. We have increasing distress over the divisions in our country. The melting pot isn't melting together very well. There are great differences in the values and goals of America's citizens. There is less dialogue and compromise taking place.

As Christians, it is difficult to know where we fit in modern America. Many are unsure of what God expects of us as citizens in an increasingly secular nation. Christians have never agreed on what a Christian response should be towards culture and government. Let me give you a definition of culture.

Culture is an umbrella term which includes the social behaviors, language, dress, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, and habits expressed by, and expected of, individuals within human groups.

America was first shaped by Christians and others with a Christian background and we have benefited for many years by that influence. But America's culture has grown increasingly less reflective of Christian values and beliefs since World War II. These days many Christians in America are unsure about how to relate to culture and government.

Over the centuries a Christian response to culture has taken various forms.

For example, **Some Christians withdraw from Culture.** They choose to isolate themselves from the surrounding culture. Such groups include the Amish and some Mennonites.

A second approach is the opposite of the first. **Some Christians go along with Culture.** These adopt an uncritical acceptance of culture. In order to do this they often re-interpret or ignore Biblical passages that condemn some things that culture accepts, such as gay marriage. This approach is reflected in some groups of the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Methodist denominations.

A third reaction to culture lies between these two extremes. **Some Christians live in tension with Culture.** These live with the tension of serving Jesus while living and working in a culture that does not serve Jesus. Most evangelicals live out this reaction to culture. We go along with culture to the extent that culture shares our values. We resist culture where it falls short of what we value.

We believe the Bible to be true. We believe the Bible to be God's revelation to us. So we look to the Bible for God's help in relating to culture. This morning lets be reminded what it says on the subject at hand.

1. A Christian's first allegiance must be to Jesus.

In Acts 5, the Jewish High Priest and his associates arrested the apostles of Jesus and gave them strict orders not to teach about Jesus any more. Let's see what the apostles answered them.

Acts 5:29 (NIV) Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

Even though the authorities here were religious leaders, not government leaders, the principle is the same. Our allegiance to Jesus as Lord comes before any secular authorities, institutions, or relationships, be they government, courts, marriage, or family. For us there is to be one over-arching allegiance to Jesus.

Jesus paid a high price for our souls with his death on the cross. No loyalty, pledge, oath, or commitment is to take precedence over His claim on us.

We must guard against the attitude of some who think of their country in god-like terms. Country becomes their idol. As Christians, we are not to worship America, its culture, its government, or its freedom. We can enjoy the benefits of these, but must not give them our highest allegiance. That is reserved for Jesus.

A few decades ago, a Navy chaplain was fired for ending his prayer with "in Jesus' name." For him this was one of those times when his commitment to God took a higher priority over his commitment to all other things. Let us make sure our commitment to God is first, especially when that commitment conflicts with any other commitment.

2. A Christian must guard against the godless values of the world.

There are many passages in the New Testament that warn us against acceptance of cultural values opposed to God.

James 4:4 (NIV) You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (Ro. 12:2; Colossians 2:8, 20; James 1:27; 1 Peter 2:11; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 2:15-16)

3. A Christian must obey the laws of the land.

This is the command of God.

1 Peter 2:13-14 (NIV) Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. (Romans 13:1-6)

Law is not bad. Law provides a foundation for civilization. Every group of people living and working together needs rules, laws, and customs of some kind. Otherwise there would be anarchy and chaos. We would live in constant fear of each other.

The authority of government, courts, and police comes from God. So, when we disobey the laws of the land, we are disobeying God. We are rejecting God's authority.

The laws of the land may not all be fair, just, useful, or even make any sense. But that does not give us the right to refuse to obey them. We do not have the right to pick and choose which laws to obey and which not. Fortunately, in our country we have the freedom to make changes to laws. We can elect those who will make good laws.

4. A Christian must pay their assigned taxes. (Romans 13:6)

Jesus was questioned about this very thing.

Luke 20:22-25 (NIV) Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

He... said to them, "Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

He said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

One man, complaining about taxes and governments, sent the following note with his check to the IRS,

"My poor condition is due to Federal laws, state laws, county laws, city laws, liquor laws, corporation laws, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, sisters-in-law, and outlaws. These laws force me to pay business tax, amusement tax, head tax, gas tax, income tax, furniture tax, and excise tax. Even my brains are taxed!

"My business is so governed that it is no easy matter for me to find out who owns it. I am inspected, suspected, disrespected, rejected, infected, deflected, dejected, examined, re-examined, informed, reformed, fined, commanded, and compelled until I provide an inexhaustible supply of money for every known need, desire, or hope of the human race."

Now there is a man with a tax problem. You may not like the amount of taxes you owe. You may not like the way they are added up or what they are used for. That does not give you the right not to pay them.

Look again at what Jesus said, "Who's inscription is on the money?" The money in your pocket does not display Moses, Isaiah, Micah, Jesus, Peter, or Paul. The money in your pocket displays George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Andrew Jackson. Our money represents the nation of America not the Kingdom of God. The government prints the money and gets to decide how much we must give in taxes.

Our obedience to this command is a stewardship issue. As a Christian, your money is really God's money. And if he wants the government to have it, so be it.

5. A Christian must honor public officials.

1 Peter 2:17 Show proper respect to everyone... fear God, honor the king.

We honor public officials by addressing them correctly.

The president is Mr. President. The judge is Your Honor. The senator is Senator so and so. When we say, "Trump", instead of "President Trump", we are failing to give him the honor due the office. No matter how you feel about the man, God expects us to show honor and respect to the office.

We also honor public officials by impartially evaluating their service.

When we evaluate someone we do not like or respect, we can overlook any good decisions in favor of bad decisions. This is an application of the golden rule. You certainly don't want to be remembered only for your mistakes in judgment.

6. A Christian should pray for public officials.

Paul instructed Timothy for the church.

1 Timothy 2:1-2 (NIV) I urge, then, first, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

So pray for your government leaders. Pray for the decisions they must make that affect us all. Pray that God will give them wisdom. Pray that God will convict them of what is right. Pray that God will give them good advisors and correct information. Pray that he help them see all sides of a problem and all the solutions as well. And pray that God will give them the courage to do the right thing.

Now why would God be concerned with us doing all these things when it comes to our nation? Because we are a light to Jesus. We want people to be drawn to Jesus through us. That will not happen if we are law breakers. That will not happen if we fall to the low level of dishonoring others that we see so much of in today's culture. In order not to hinder the gospel, let us keep these expectations of God.

So, there is nothing in the Bible about who to vote for, or even to vote at all. We have the right to vote in America. That does not mean we must exercise that right. If no one is qualified for an office, it might be more Christian to abstain from voting for that office.

We live with the tension of allegiance to Jesus while living among a people who have many different allegiances than we do. We need God's grace. We need to be filled with, and led by, the Holy Spirit. Let us pray for this as well.

Invitation

Jesus died to make it possible for us to live right with God. As his adopted children, we must live in obedience to him. Jesus is Lord means we owe him our allegiance in all aspects of our lives. This is what it means to receive him as Lord.

Today you can be forgiven of your sins by trusting in Jesus' death as payment for your sins and giving your allegiance to Jesus.