

“Is Patriotism Christian?”

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Recently, I've noticed a disturbing trend amongst Christian thought. Actually, it's not really anything that new; it was really the level of fervor that caught my attention. It can be easily seen in the reaction to the recent decision by Federal Appeals Court # 9, out in California. Unless you've just recently emerged from an expedition of spelunking, I'm sure you've heard of it. The words, “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance have rendered the entire statement unconstitutional, at least according to two of the three chief justices of that particular court. It breaks the so-called Establishment clause of the Constitution, also known as the First Amendment.

That the increasingly liberal court would come to this conclusion is really no surprise, although the timing is curious. What startled me was the response across the board from evangelical Christians. I'm sure you've also heard their response. It ranges from simplistic statements about changing the nation's money (It does say “In God We Trust” – but the Supreme Court ruled on that case five years ago, so it's not really an issue these days), to genuine outrage that the court should act in the same manner it has for the past decade. Now I'm not saying that the court was right, or that the judges don't need a refresher course in decorum and public opinion, but the Christian response seems to me to be very out of proportion, all things considered.

You see, I was raised, as a Christian to look to the Bible as the source of all truth, “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). And the funny thing is, Jesus teaches us in the Gospels that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36, others). That seems to contradict attitude of the large portion of evangelical Christians who take up an inordinate amount of time worrying about this or that court decision or law or political decision.

So my question is this, “Is Patriotism Christian?” And I'm not asking what your pastor said, or what the folks who do the morning show on the Christian radio station say, or what the guy on the late-night Christian TV talk show says, but what does the Bible say? Throughout His time on earth, Jesus preached that His reign was not on the earth or over the governments of the earth, but of another world, an eternity beyond what we can currently see.

Now, I'm not saying flying the flag or supporting our troops here and abroad or being proud of our country is wrong. I am just as proud as anyone else of our great land, and the fact that it was founded as a place for religious freedom, by men who worshipped the same Heavenly Father we do (Okay, so I'm not the guy with 15 flags flying off of his old beat-up Chevy ½ ton truck, but I do my part). In fact, both Jesus and the Apostle Paul said to respect the government in place. Jesus even advocated paying taxes and remaining obedient to the governing Romans. The same Romans who kept passing and enforcing laws that kept the Jews from properly worshipping their God, and brought their whole pan-theistic attitude into a country that was founded for the worship of the One True God. Sound familiar?

The worst part of the whole situation is that Christians only seem to rise up at these odd intervals when something catastrophic (in their opinion) happens. I have no problem with Christians getting involved in the governing bodies in their areas, from the school board to the Presidency. In fact, I don't think

they do nearly enough to advance their unique faith perspective on the world. Too often we hide in our own little worlds, never advancing outside the church's shelter, except when the world threatens to invade the areas we see as sacred. Then we rise up, outraged that the world we left to its own devices has made its own decisions, devoid of faith. What did we expect?

If you want to get involved, please DO. Run for school board, city council, state or national office. Even if you don't win, at least you can say you tried, and often that's enough to bring the person who did win to a place where he makes some concessions to satiate the people who didn't vote for him.

I often argue politics with a good Christian friend of mine, who happens to be a staunch Democrat. But I cannot debate one point he makes consistently, although I wish I could. One of the reasons he is a Democrat is because, despite all their faults, they are always standing up and creating socially conscious programs. Democrats have taken over, for various reasons, all of the programs that the Christians are supposed to be handling. While their motives are often far from pure, Democratic-sponsored programs care for the sick, injured, homeless, jobless, fatherless, widowed, and those in prison – the least of these.

As Christians, we should be ashamed that we sit here and make a huge deal out of two words in the Pledge of Allegiance when people are dying without our help. What's worse, they are dying in sin because we're too busy debating and writing letters and ordering videos and making donations to political organizations to TELL THEM ABOUT JESUS.

You do remember that, right? The Great Commission. Go out and make disciples of all men. Teach men and women everywhere that Jesus came and died for them, regardless of their background or history. Their future can be victorious because the Lord of the Universe cared enough to sacrifice Himself in a horrible death to open the doors of Heaven to all who believe.

In his book "Deadly Detours," Bob Briner points out why it is so easy to fall into the trap of being 'politically Christian.' "It is... easy to see why American Christians heed the siren song of political action... It is always significantly easier to send money to some Christian organization that is promoting a political agenda than it is to do the real work that Christ calls us to do... Sending money, signing petitions, attending rallies... all these things make Christians feel that they are productively engaged in God's work. But they are all deadly detours – deadly because they rob us of the joy we receive when we are obedient and particularly because people are dying in their sin while we pursue our political agendas instead of the agenda Christ commands us to pursue."¹

So, is Patriotism Christian? That depends on your approach. Like everything else, we should be asking ourselves, 'Does this advance the cause of Christ' or 'Will this show God's love?' If the answer to either question is no or maybe not, take an extra minute to consider your course of action. Some things must still be pursued, but a cautious approach would be recommended. A popular phrase these days is "What Would Jesus Do?" I think a better question to ask is "What DID Jesus Do?" Then do it.

¹ Bob Briner, Deadly Detours

(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996) 32-3.