

FROM THE PASTOR'S PEN



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GOD AND POLITICS

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The relationship of church and state has always been messy business. There are those who think that the two are one and the same – the Bible makes no such affirmation. There are also those who think that the two are easily separable – the Bible makes no such allowance. What we believe, particularly concerning matters of right and wrong, of justice and peace, of freedom and authority, directly relates to how we vote, how leaders rule, and what we expect from our leaders.

What should be the relationship between Christians and political leaders?

My own view is that on the one hand, we should start from a loose relationship based upon a clear understanding of human sin. Leaders are fallible people who are incapable of entirely delivering upon what they promise. The most obvious problem arrives when people, committed to a particular political party or person, will go to great lengths to defend their candidate's strengths while downplaying their weaknesses. In contrast, they exaggerate their opponent's weaknesses while ignoring their strengths. The popular "conventional wisdom," as Newsweek weekly puts it, to label leaders as either "all saint" or "all sinner" by an up or down vote is simply historical nonsense.

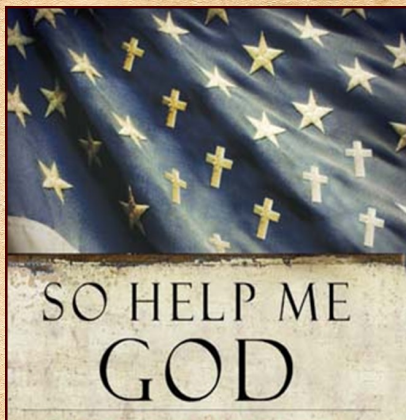
Well, leaders are sinners. A Christian should be able, without any insecurity involved, to commend the strengths and the positions of any party while at the same time critique any weaknesses or obvious departures from Biblical truth. This is the prophetic role of the Christian – to never be so tied to the machine that we lack in courage to hold them accountable to behavior or positions we disagree with or lack the humility to commend others when they are right.

On the other hand, however, we should be constantly engaged in fervent prayer for our leaders and submission to them as God's appointed rulers. The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy:

¹ I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Leaders have difficult roles in protecting the peace, and they need God's guidance in doing so. Even more importantly, though, is that leaders have been called by God. Paul also writes to the church in Rome:

¹ Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.



Note here that leaders are established by God (whether or not they understand this) – and therefore are held accountable by him (whether or not they understand even this). Whoever wins elections they are established by God to exercise authority on his behalf. When they depart from Biblical truth, we can disagree with them, we can participate in the democratic process for

change. But whoever serves in the Oval Office or the chamber of the City Council needs our prayers and intercession and thanksgiving – the Bible tells us to do so. May we pray constantly for our leaders, may we let them lead, but we may also have the courage as Christians to speak truth to power, regardless of party.

President Obama last, in the midst of his inauguration, swore an oath with the words "So Help Me God." The only hope and help for anyone is God. Our Christian prayer for him should be the