

MEDIA



SPOTLIGHT

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS & SECULAR MEDIA



With the upcoming elections many Christians are concerned about the future not only for the country, but for their personal lives. What will things be like with Barack Obama or John McCain as president? What will they be like with a Republican or Democrat Congress? How will our economy fare? What will happen to *Roe v. Wade*? What will happen with illegal immigration? Not all who call themselves Christians are in agreement on those issues. Of particular concern is who will occupy the office of the presidency.

More and more power is being vested in the president through the implementation of executive orders, many of which are designed to circumvent the power of Congress. The executive branch has become a legislative arm, contrary to the limits placed upon it by the Constitution. In the wrong hands that legislative power could become despotic; some believe it already has, at least to some degree.

Christians are finding American society increasingly antagonistic toward the faith. To a large extent constitutional restraints upon our government have prevented it from reflecting that antagonism. What if, in a worst-case scenario, those restraints are overridden by a despot occupying the White House, and Congress decides to give him free reign?

Additionally, the world is making it more and more difficult for believers in Jesus as well as those holding a biblical ethic to follow their consciences. In some

cases state governments and the federal government are mandating that we act contrary to our consciences. This will lead to more persecution in one form or another. Perhaps we won't be chained to a wall and lashed but people may lose their jobs. Their financial security – perhaps even their homes – may be taken from them. They may be thrown in jail, they may be fined. Who knows all the things that could come from these things? The point is that if the government becomes so ungodly that we end up like our brethren in China, it is because God will have established it so.

How will that impact the Body of Christ? What should be the attitude of believers in Jesus?

The apostle Paul wrote to Titus:

Remind them to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit which He shed

upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:1-7)

God has made us subject to principalities and powers upon this earth. We are not to be disobedient to government; we are not to be unruly; we are not to be brawlers (this particularly applies to civil disobedience such as rioting or disorderly conduct). We are to speak evil of no man. In the case of our upcoming elections we are not to speak evil of a candidate we don't like.

I believe I'm on safe ground to say that most of our readers are not favorable toward Barack Obama because of his positions on abortion and homosexuality, among other things. But if Barack Obama becomes president, even with his ungodly policies, God will have placed him there.

Is it alright to speak evil of him at this time because he is not yet president, but merely a candidate? No. We are not to speak evil of him even now. He is a senator in the Congress of the United States, but that's not the only reason. We are not to speak evil of any man at any time.

There is a temptation within the Body of Christ to speak evil of political leaders because we listen to commentators who in ignorance pander to our natural tendency to denigrate those with whom we are in disagreement. Those commentators

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may be correct in their assessment of a leader's position on issues, but when they denigrate that leader we must not allow ourselves to follow suit lest we find ourselves fighting against God.

I will therefore remind you – though you once knew this – how the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their first estate, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness until the judgment of the great day, even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in the same way, giving themselves over to fornication and going after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil, disputing about the body of Moses, dared not bring a railing accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

But these speak evil of those things which they do not know, but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain and run greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the disobedience of Korah. (Jude 1:5-11)

Jude was saying that these people were speaking evil of earthly authorities established by God and, in so doing, were corrupting themselves. Because all authority is established by God:

This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones to the intent

that the living may know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will, and sets up the lowest of men over it. (Daniel 4:17)

This doesn't necessarily mean the lowest in character; more properly it means the lowest in societal stature, such as David who was a mere shepherd boy when anointed by Samuel to be king over Israel.

For true believers in Jesus it doesn't really matter who our next president will be. God is in control. He is not only in control of our individual lives He is in control of government. If God deems that this nation should receive a particular form of leadership that might cause hardship, then that is what we will receive. Certainly God has allowed that before.

God has blessed America above all other nations on earth. Even with the economic situation as it is, we're still blessed above all other nations. We mainly see how our economy is affected, but all the world's economies are being affected in a similar manner. The world is being prepared for circumstances that are going to lead to the Lord's return. And every man who is put into a position of power, and every nation, including China, Iran and North Korea, is put there by God to bring about His purposes.

It may be easier for us to accept ungodly authority if we remember that no one's power is eternal except God's. Our presidents hold terms of four to eight years and then they are gone (at least until the law changes). In some countries authority is held by someone for the term of his life or until he becomes incapacitated or overthrown. But all men die eventually, and the world continues to stand. More important, God's Kingdom continues to stand. The heavens and the earth will pass away, but the Word of God will not pass away (Matthew 24:35).

Some argue that they need not honor the man but the office he holds. Yet we

may not speak evil of the man and still honor his office. Again, as Paul said, we are to speak evil of no man.

Speaking evil isn't pointing out one's flaws; it isn't pointing out the fallacies of one's position. It is not necessarily saying, "I think (fill in the blank) is a really bad guy." It doesn't mean we can't say anything negative about unrighteous leaders. Speaking evil means to denigrate, to ridicule, to make snide remarks. It means hateful speech; it means speaking with the intent to demean and/or hurt others.

What is our heart attitude in saying what we say about a political candidate? We may speak the truth but in what manner do we speak it? Are we speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15)? We are to hold no hatred, or ridicule, or demeaning thoughts or attitudes within ourselves or expressed to others in discussing things spiritual or temporal.

We may discuss Obama's policies on abortion and homosexual rights and call them evil because they are evil. But if we ridicule the man or speak hatefully about him we've overstepped the boundaries of biblical righteousness.

Some may say, "I can hate the man because of his stand on abortion."

No you can't. You may say you hate his stand on abortion but you may not hate any man.

Remember that you were the same. Perhaps you have always held a righteous position on abortion even before you came to Christ, but you were at enmity against Christ before His grace established you in His Kingdom. In view of God's grace it would be hypocritical of us to judge sinners by our own righteousness. Yet many Christians believe they may speak evil of others, as if they had attained their own righteousness.

If we recognize through humility that it is not we who have attained to righteousness but Christ who has attained it for us then we can't speak evil of anyone else. All we can do is pity them. And pity is a valid attitude.

I pity Barack Obama. I don't hate the man. I hate his policies; I may say that. But I don't know if God might one day establish him in the Kingdom and he become a true brother in Christ. Some of the most vile people have come to Christ.

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Before we open our mouths about anyone we must first check our own spirit, asking ourselves, “Why am I saying this?” “Is this important to be said?” “Am I just venting because I hate this person?”

The important thing to remember is that the reason we are not to speak evil of others is because we are representatives of the Lord and we are to act as He did. The spirit of humility He possessed should be in us. Does a humble man speak evil of others?

Well, Jesus did call the scribes and Pharisees “evil,” “vipers,” “whitened sepulchers.” Was that not speaking evil of authority?

No, Jesus is the Word of God who recognized that these men were destroying His people in His name. He has the authority to call them those things.

The scribes and Pharisees held no authority over Jesus who was their creator and Lord, even though they did not recognize Him as such. We do not have the same liberty to rail against those in authority over us. Again, remember Michael’s words to Satan: “The Lord rebuke you.” If the Lord can rebuke Satan, the Lord can rebuke any man because no man holds authority over the Lord. The Lord holds authority over His creation.

Paul is our example. He spoke against the high priest, not knowing the one he spoke against was the high priest. When confronted by the high priest’s servant, Paul apologized (Acts 23:1-5). If Paul would not knowingly speak against unrighteous authority, what gives us the right to do so?

We have an anointing from the Holy One; He will guide us into all truth. The Lord corrects us by His truth. If we react unrighteously He will say, “You shouldn’t have that attitude.” Our proper response will be, “Lord, forgive me for that.” Thus we maintain our relationship with the Lord.

Every day we encounter circumstances through people who challenge our faithfulness to the Word. How are we going to react to them? Are we going to be guided by the Holy Spirit or are we going to “vent”? Are we going to try to exercise God’s vengeance which we have no right to exercise?

We are told in Scripture that Lot, living in an ungodly environment, was vexed in his righteous soul. How he must have been irritated daily by what was happening in Sodom. Such is human existence. We are given this test all the time. But we are to walk according to the Holy Spirit’s leading. When we are obedient to His leading it causes us to draw close to the Lord. We can go one way or the other: we can go with our own “feel-good,” and walk away from the Lord, or we can bow our knee in obedience and be drawn closer to Him.

Again, it doesn’t matter who will be president other than how it affects us temporally. We may hold concerns about who will become president because it will affect all sorts of issues – even moral and spiritual issues that are so dear to us. But how dear are those issues to God?

Is God concerned about abortion? I believe He is because it is contrary to His Word and is begging His judgment upon this nation.

Is God concerned about the immorality and the preference given to homosexuals by government? Yes, I believe He is.

Is God concerned about a particular taxing issue? Not necessarily.

Is God concerned about personal freedom? Yes and no. If He were really concerned about it He could easily place people in power all over the world who would grant personal freedom to everyone. But personal freedom merely gives man more freedom to sin. God knows that an authoritative government stifles human expression. And what does Scripture say but that the imagination of our

hearts is only evil continually (Genesis 6:5). The more free a society is the more outwardly sinful it is going to be.

Granted, inwardly all mankind is the same. But God wants order established in His universe. A nation that will not adhere to His righteousness is begging His judgment and may be given over to slavery, just as Israel was twice sent into captivity.

When God sent Israel into captivity He told the people that they would obey and serve the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar; if they did not do so they would incur God’s judgment. Even pagan governments are to be obeyed.

We can criticize sharia law in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Muslim world and say how awful its extremes are. But look at the crime rate and the outward expressions of homosexuality. True, the governments are evil in many ways, and the evil of the citizens’ hearts are often manifested in secret. But the truth remains that oppressive governments keep their citizens under control.

We in America have been blessed by God not because we are more righteous than others but because for some 200 years our citizens have conducted themselves by the biblical ethic inherited from our ancestors who were impacted by the Gospel. As the nation increasingly turns from that biblical ethic our government will become increasingly oppressive. But this will be by God’s design.

God established the authority over the Muslim nations, and He established the authority over this nation. The day may come when they merge into an oppressive world government. If we lose sight of the truth that when the government speaks it is God speaking, then we will fall into Satan’s trap of railing against government. Even if the government speaks evil it is God’s voice because God has established its authority.

So even if the government is blatantly wrong, it’s still right?

The concise answer is yes. Whenever we speak evil of any authority we are usurping God’s place over that authority. We are not allowed to say things to or about authorities that God alone is allowed to say to or about them.

Some may say, “I don’t care what God says, I’m going to say this about Obama because it makes me feel so good to say it.

It's clever. I can get others to laugh at him, and that's just fine, I don't like him, etc., etc." This reflects a rebellious heart. The best thing we can do is keep our mouths shut and pray for the Lord to do what He is going to do.

The bridge between God's requirement in His Word for our hearts in our daily lives, and us living out His requirement, is grace. Without His grace we cannot walk in His Spirit. His Holy Spirit convicts our hearts when we sin and when we act contrary to His will whether through conscious sin, ignorance, or carelessness.

It comes down to where our hearts are in relation to God's Word and His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn't force us to keep our mouths shut. The Holy Spirit doesn't force us to do what is right. But He plants a thought in our minds and brings to remembrance the Word of God that says, "Don't do this; it doesn't honor Me." The Holy Spirit tells us, "Don't say that." If we don't listen to His Spirit we're going to say it.

How do we know what the Holy Spirit is saying? We know His mind by knowing His Word. It's really simple. But it's not always easy.

The simple thing is this: God has established all authority; if I am in a position of authority I learn from God's Word how to exercise that authority. I am not to lord it over people; I am not to beat them; I don't mistreat them. There are rules for authority, too.

For those under authority it doesn't matter how that authority acts. We honor the authority.

The authority will answer to God for how it exercises authority. Those under authority will answer to God for how it honors or dishonors authority.

We can talk all we want about being Christians and sing, "I love you Lord, and I lift my voice to worship You," and so on. But is it only lip service?

Referencing Isaiah, Jesus said about Israel, "These people draw near to me with their mouths and honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me" (Matthew 15:8).

We must be careful that we aren't merely giving God lip service so that when it comes to obeying His Word in those areas that are most difficult to obey we stray from Him.

It's easy to say, "Well, I'd never assassinate a political leader I hate, so what's the big deal?"

Jesus said that if we hate anyone we are guilty of murder in our hearts. So if we hate Barack Obama we are guilty of murder.

We don't have to like evil men who govern, but we do have to love them. We're to be obedient to government authorities and we are to do it in a quiet spirit.

Place yourself in the position of a child under the authority of his parents. Is he free in Christ to denigrate or complain about his parents? No. Not even if his parents are entirely wrong. Nor is he free to disobey his parents unless, as a believer in Jesus, he is instructed to act contrary to God's Word. But even then he must respectfully tell his parents why he cannot obey them. In the same way, if we must disobey government because its instructions are contrary to our higher authority we must do so with respect. The growing number of true believers in China has not been attained by Christian leaders hating their Communist rulers or by speaking evil of them. Rather, their suffering in patience has been a testimony of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

That's what Jesus lived under in the Roman Empire. Israel was a conquered people. Never did Jesus or the apostles speak evil of the Roman government. In spite of the strong feelings we have against those in authority, feelings that we believe to be righteous indignation, the Lord requires that we honor and pray for them. More than that, we are to love them.

Love is not a "feel good" attitude toward them. Love means that we have only good desires for them. In some cases a good desire may be the backhand of God. But we honestly in our hearts must desire whatever it takes to bring them to repentance and the knowledge of the Lord.

Paul never spoke evil of Nero even though Nero was responsible for the deaths of many believers and of Paul himself.

Under Roman persecution, Christians were falsely blamed for many things. But they were never blamed for saying hateful things against the emperor. They were never guilty of political insurrection.

Now, we may certainly warn one another of an evil man. Paul told Timothy to beware of Alexander the coppersmith because he had done Paul much evil and

had strongly contradicted Paul's words. Paul said, "The Lord reward him according to his works" (2 Timothy 4:14-15). Paul was standing in defense of God's Word.

We may even warn one another of evil men in the world, not just false brethren. But we are not allowed to hate anyone.

Satan would love for us to compromise our testimony by causing us to hate. But Jesus tells us to love our enemies.

Is Barack Obama your enemy? No, not any more than someone who tries to harm you personally. Let's say you have an enemy in your workplace - someone who wants to hurt you. Is that person any more loveable than Barack Obama? Yet God says, "Love your enemies." So if you can love the man who is out to destroy you personally then you can love Barack Obama, or any other politician, who isn't even aware of your existence.

SATAN'S AUTHORITY

The consensus among many Christians is that their evil thoughts and every bad thing that happens to them is Satan beating on them; therefore they are to rebuke Satan. Particularly in some Pentecostal and charismatic circles people say they're going to "stomp" on Satan; they're going to kick him across the stage or do other terrible things to him.

This is one of the worst teachings in the Body of Christ and, in reality, is a victory for Satan. We don't have that authority, and such mocking plays into Satan's hand to get us to act contrary to God's Word.

Only God has the authority to "kick" Satan anywhere. Satan is one of God's highest created order. We must not forget that. God has given him authority in this world to test the hearts of men. How will we live our lives? Will we live according to God's Word, or will we live according to our own desires?

Satan knows (and we should know) that our own desires are not God's desires unless we bring our desires into conformity with His desires. We do that by studying His Word to learn what His desires are. This doesn't mean we're not going to stumble along the way and follow bad teaching. But if our hearts are in the right place God will bring us to where we hear the truth, will know it's the truth, and then have to make a decision.

Because God has given Satan authority in the world we are not to speak evil even of him. We aren't to rebuke Satan, such as many Christians do because of bad teaching. If we are dealing directly with Satan we may say, "The Lord rebuke you." But how many times are we dealing directly with Satan? More often than not evil thoughts come from our fallen nature still resident in our soul and flesh. Or we're dealing with other human entities that entice us to evil.

In any case, we may go no further than the archangel Michael, and say, "The Lord rebuke you."

Michael knew that Satan's authority is God, and that Michael's own authority is God. It wasn't up to Michael to usurp God's authority over Satan. Nor is it up to us to usurp God's authority over Satan.

We aren't greater than Michael. In some respects as redeemed men filled with the Spirit of God we have certain authority. God will one day put Satan under our feet (Romans 16:20), but He has not done so yet. For now all power has been placed under Jesus (Ephesians 1:20-23). It is not our power, but God's power within us that works (2 Corinthians 4:7). And even though we are granted by His grace to be instruments of His power, we cannot use it contrary to His Word or outside the leading of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if His Word tells us that He establishes all power, including Satan's power over the world, then we must honor all power and not rail against it. Otherwise we would be found railing against God.

Our position in Christ should not be demonstrated through a flippant or demeaning attitude; it is a position we receive with soberness - with the reality that the god of this world will be put under our feet only by the grace of God. Even now Satan has no authority over our spiritual lives, but he may be granted authority by God over our temporal lives. Just as God gave Satan authority over Job's temporal life for a season God may still allow us to suffer under Satan for God's purpose. And just as our brethren in China and other areas of the world are suffering under Satan, no believer is immune from suffering. Why? Because whatever we suffer in this world under the authorities that God has placed over us is for our good.

OUR SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

We do not have temporal authority in the world, but we do possess authority over spiritual matters. Jesus honored Caesar's authority by telling the Pharisees' disciples and the Herodians to "render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesars, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:15-22). But when it came to the religious authorities and their corrupting of God's ways we see a different Jesus.

The Lord took the time to braid a whip and then overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple, driving them out. It is the only place in Scripture where we see Jesus get violent. He went nose-to-nose with the scribes and Pharisees; he told them off and called them despicable names. This is a different Jesus than we see elsewhere in God's Word.

We also see a different Paul - the same Paul who tells us, "Speak evil of no man," and "Overcome evil with good." When someone crosses the faith in relation to the Gospel, Paul vehemently lashes into them.

When Paul addressed the sorcerer Elymas who hindered the Gospel he called him out:

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

Then Saul (who also is called Paul), filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him and said, "O full of all subtlety and all mischief, you child of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, look, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a season." And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. (Acts 13:8-12)

The early believers, as docile as they were in relation to the world, turned and called the Gnostics "sons of the devil." Why? Because they pointed out that the Gnostics were what the Lord called "tares" in their midst.

This is an entirely different realm than politics. This is a moral, religious realm into which we have a calling from God. It's a Gospel realm.

The Lord said to the Pharisees, "You hypocrites," "You vipers." He didn't say, "You Herodites." He didn't put a political twist to it. It was a moral, spiritual thing that they were claiming to be sent from God and they were liars. Jesus pointed it out, and that's what we're to do.

This is a Kingdom issue. We have authority in the Kingdom of God; we do not have authority in the world. If someone comes into our assembly and perverts the Word of God then those who know the Word and recognize the perversion must correct him. If he does not receive the correction and continues to pervert the Word of God then our position should be the same as Paul's, which would be to take a strong stand and, if necessary, remove him from the assembly.

We have not only the right, but the duty to call out false teachers in the Body of Christ. So where is the line drawn between speaking evil of someone and calling them out for their errors?

If there is an intent in my heart to inflict hurt upon someone, then that is evil. If it is to expose the error so that truth may win out in men's hearts - if it's not hurt for hurt's sake - then my position is honorable to God.

The power of God vindicated Paul. Elymas became blind. Why didn't Paul just do the same with Nero and save many believers from having their heads cut off or from being torn apart by wild animals? Because Paul didn't have authority over Nero whose authority was in a different realm.

Paul asked, what have we to do with those outside the Body of Christ? His very question implies, "nothing." We don't judge them; we judge within the Body of Christ. So Paul called out those who taught error, often by name. He turned some over to Satan for the destruction of their flesh. That is real authority.

Do you see the two realms? One is the world, the other is the Kingdom of God. Jesus didn't deal with Greece or Rome, where there was a lot of sin and paganism; He dealt with Israel which was God's people.

Now, what about the authority within a church that turns to error? How do we approach them?

You show respect and speak the truth to them in love. If that doesn't change things then you have a decision to make. Do you want to expose the evil? Or do you want to just leave silently as so many do? This is where you seek the leading of the Holy Spirit as to how you approach the situation. Just because we have the freedom to act in a certain way doesn't mean we have to act in that way. Allow the Spirit of God to lead. Seek counsel from other brethren who are strong in the faith and can help you.

This is one thing that is lacking so much in the Body of Christ: seeking counsel from true brethren, not just from "ordained" people.

Since these are the authorities within the Body of Christ, would we not be usurping their authority by calling them out for their error?

Here we're speaking about an institutional form of "church" government which is contrary to Scripture. The "elders" and "deacons" are often not scripturally qualified elders or deacons, but men (and women) elected for a term. But as far as many Christians think, they are under proper authority. They just don't know any better. Yet God holds us responsible to know better. He has given us His Word to instruct us. We may either study His Word to learn the truth, or we may trust others to lead us into truth. But we must still test their words to be sure they conform to God's Word.

At whatever juncture in our walk with Christ we find ourselves we are still responsible to God for the knowledge we have. As long as one believes his pastor is the authority in his life then one must treat the pastor as God's authority. Many pastors are doing the best they can within their system, and if one chooses to place himself under a professional pastor, then one should respect and honor him as he would any authority.

We who have fuller understanding of these things may say, "It's institutionalism and therefore out of order according to God's Word." But the intent of the heart is still a consideration. And sadly, as far as most Christians know or understand it, the pastor and/or the "church" is his authority. Thus they allow the "church" to dictate to them what it wants them to know and act upon. This may be true of

the simplest country church to the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Rome.

God has never placed any of His children under the authority of an institution. Believers have placed themselves there. So they are free to leave at any time without being fearful that they may be rejecting God's authority.

The function of eldership is not to dictate but to lead by example. There are three aspects in Scripture that give balance to leadership within the assembly: 1) elders; 2) open ministry; 3) oneness in spirit. If any of those is missing you have an unbalanced idea of leadership. If you do away with open ministry and/or oneness you end up with elders or professional clergy who dictate. It doesn't matter if you have one leader dictating, or ten leaders dictating, they are still usurping the Lord's place.

Our foremost authority is Jesus Christ and His Word. They are one authority because they cannot be separated. Where people in the Body of Christ, including leaders, are corrupting the Body, our authority requires us to confront them, but respectfully - at least initially.

There is good reason we are told to test the spirits to see if they are of God or not (1 John 4:1). There is good reason we are told to earnestly contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). In all encounters our attitude must be one of love for those whom we confront, desiring for them to be restored to the truth.

Things don't always go the way we desire. There is often pain, grief, and sorrow to follow. But that's the price we must be willing to pay.

WHICH KINGDOM?

Jesus tells us to love our enemies. This is counter-intuitive and cannot be done apart from the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

Our human nature is such that we want to lash out at anyone we perceive as "evil." But isn't that really just self-righteousness? As Paul said, we were the same until the grace of God was manifested in our lives. Before we came to Christ we were slaves to sin; we were slaves to Satan. We are no longer slaves to Satan, but we can succumb to sin. That is the subtlety of the evil within our own hearts.

It is subtle because we tell ourselves, "Well, I'm only standing up for righteousness. This man is evil so I have every right to disrespect him. After all, didn't John the Baptist publicly call out Herod for the sin of marrying his brother's wife?"

Yes he did. So how do we reconcile this?

Herod was the king of Israel. He was subject to the Law of Moses represented by John the Baptist. John was called to prepare the way of the Lord by calling all men to repentance. He saw that Herod was dishonoring the Lord and corrupting the nation by his sin. So he properly told Herod that it wasn't right for him to have Herodias as his wife. He was pointing out Herod's sin, but nowhere do we see him speaking evil of Herod. I'm certain that somewhere in his heart he was hoping that Herod would repent; he didn't want Herod to die in his sins.

So yes, we can call out public sin. But judgment must first begin in the house of God - the Body of Christ (1 Peter 4:17). Until we are ready to deal first with our own sins, and then with sin in the Body of Christ, how can we judge those in the world whom we expect to be sinners? How can we judge those who do not have the Spirit of God to convict them of their sins and to prompt them to do what is right?

Now, those who claim to know Christ are open to judgment not only by those in the Body of Christ but by the world itself.

No one may come into the assembly and say "I'm a follower of Jesus Christ, a Christian," and then openly sin with impunity. Anybody in the assembly may call him out, but what is the purpose? It is to restore him to righteousness so that he may not only be in unity with the Father and Jesus, but with us. We do not call out people's sins in order to destroy them, but to prompt them to repentance. This is so that God, not we, will be glorified.

The more evil a man is that turns to God the more God is glorified. He who is forgiven much loves much.

Consider our brethren in China. They still obey the laws; they are not rebelling against the government. If they are mature in Christ they are praying for their government even as their government persecutes them. Nor are they speaking evil of anyone.

It may be argued that an underground assembly, by definition, is acting contrary

to the law. Yet when it comes to a decision to obey God or man we must obey God. The apostles were forbidden by their religious leaders to proclaim Jesus. But they said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). As long as a law is not contrary to God's Word we must obey it. If a law contrary to Scripture is mandated to us then we must obey Scripture.

It depends upon which kingdom we belong to. Many Christians are rooted in the temporal world; we still have a lot of worldliness ingrained into us. But Jesus told Pontius Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world." We must say, "I don't belong to this kingdom; I belong to the Kingdom of God.

John's Revelation gives us hope when it says, "The kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). This kingdom (singular) is Satan's kingdom, which is comprised of the many kingdoms of men. This is why Jesus told His disciples to be of good cheer because He had overcome (past-tense) the world (John 16:33). This was before His death and resurrection. He had defeated Satan by His demonstration of God's power in the world over Satan and his demons.

Men's kingdoms are not yet surrendered to Jesus even though He rules over them. The visible manifestation of Jesus' rule will occur when He returns to the earth to establish His millennial Kingdom, and it will be fully implemented in the new heavens and new earth. In the meantime, as we walk in this world under Satan's rule we are to walk as ambassadors of God's Kingdom.

Therefore we must not allow the things of this world to take precedent over our lives. So if God says that we must honor all magistrates by obeying them, praying for them, and not speaking evil of them, then as faithful citizens of His Kingdom we must honor His Word.

If our citizenship in this world is more important than our citizenship in God's Kingdom then we will act contrary to His Word: we will rail against the government and speak evil of its leaders.

By disobeying the Word of God in this way we not only compromise our testimony, but we compromise our position within the Kingdom of God.

THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

Many Christians have gotten involved in movements among the religious right and have developed a critical spirit. They are given permission by their pastors and other teachers to be on their righteous "high horse" over political issues. It can be just as dangerous to be among believers as non-believers when it comes to politics - sometimes even more dangerous. We find ourselves in agreement with each other and we can easily get caught up in the "fun" of telling jokes and speaking in demeaning terms about politicians with whom we disagree.

No matter who becomes our next president he will inherit a difficult job, and our responsibility will be the same as it is now and always has been: pray for him.

God is neither a Democrat nor a Republican. He isn't even an American (This no doubt comes as a shock to many).

There is a danger of falling into the same trap of pride into which Satan fell. He said he would exalt his throne above the stars (angels) of God and would be like the most High God. We may not feel that way toward God, but every time we speak evil of any authority, that is essentially what we are doing: "I will ascend above God's authority."

This doesn't mean we cannot be forceful in our speaking; it doesn't mean we cannot be strong in expressing our convictions. It means we must have an honest appraisal of our standing before God and under the earthly authority He has established. If we speak evil against that authority we are speaking evil against God. Even if we speak evil against Satan we are speaking evil against God.

We do not see Jesus gathering an army to overthrow Roman rule. This is why the carnal Israelites wouldn't receive Him as their King. They wanted an earthly ruler so they crucified Him. They were disappointed in Him and chose Barabbas who was an insurrectionist.

Today the "Christian Right" would be very much like Israel. That's the spirit of it. There are some who call themselves Christians that would even sanction the assassination of a politician they consider "evil." But Jesus said that anyone who hates another and professes to be of God is a liar.

Jesus said to Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world; if My Kingdom were of this world, then My servants would fight."

This is what dominion theology is based on - that we're going to take authority over this world system before Jesus returns. That is what moves many on the Christian Right. It is a false teaching that is contrary to the Gospel. Yet a vast number of Christians, particularly in the United States and other parts of the West, believe in it and follow it. This is why they are susceptible to all this stirring up of animosity against some political leaders. Our role is to bring light to the world, but it is not to control the world.

Take Barack Obama, for example. We have nothing to do with him as a worldly leader. But Obama has a pastor who says he's preaching God's Word. It is up to that pastor to bring the Word of God to bear in the lives of all his congregants without fear of or regard to their standing in society. Within the Body of Christ the president of the United States has no more standing than a humble laborer. The same is said to be true within our constitutional republic. That's what the word "democratic" means. But is Obama's pastor bringing correction to his most famous congregant's position on abortion and homosexual fornication? If he were really preaching the truth Obama would either adhere to the truth and abandon his ungodly positions on abortion and homosexual privileges, or he would go looking for another pastor. Regardless of how one responds to the message it is up to leaders in the Body of Christ to be faithful to God's Word.

If believers are going to be a moral light and salt in the earth then spiritual leaders in the Body of Christ must take the upper hand in demonstrating that light and salt. The first thing they should do is divorce themselves from the politics of the world at least as far as causing political and social issues to interfere with the proclamation of the Gospel. This doesn't mean they cannot have convictions, or express those convictions. We are free in Christ to vote and to help others see things as we see them. But whatever one's political convictions may be, they should not be brought into the assembly. This is not a venue for worldly affairs. We may discuss the moral and religious aspects of politics and how they affect us as believers in Jesus, but the assembly should not be made the campaign headquarters for any political initiative or candidate. ❖