

While most of us are making sure we are registered to vote this November, I want to ask a much deeper question: how can we be very much first and foremost about the kingdom of God in all we say and do, while at the same time not neglecting the reality that God has placed us in this nation to seek the good of the city that he has sent us <sup>1</sup>? There is a term I am going to use a lot throughout this paper, "empire". Let me take a moment and define what I mean by "empire" so you will have a framework for what I mean. By empire, I am referring to a two-dimensional definition: the first portion begins with the internal or intangible, a principle that humanity has struggled with since Eden - lusting after more, which manifests itself in the tangible realm of needing to conquer and expand our own will and/or territory at the expense of others when necessary to advance. When this internal lust of empire leads us (personally, corporately, or nationally) to places of power we set up our leadership structures so that self-advancement, self-promotion and self-protection are the outcome, even at the expense of someone or something else. When this happens we are leading out of the spirit of empire, not the spirit of God. Here's the warning: empire is always busying herself with new disguises that we may not recognize and uses language like "free enterprise" "promoting democracy" or "spreading peace" to keep us from seeing her ugly face.

My goal is to have written an article that may be some sort of a lamp as you wade through the political waters toward the voting booth this fall by attempting to simply state some current issue along with some questions and suggestions that may or maynot shine a new perspective on them through the lens of the Kingdom. Many of us, due to upbringings, media, sermons, or what have you do not see that often times, especially in political issues we have braided together the strands of empire and kingdom so closely that we often don't know where one ends and other other begins, or at worst, believe they are the same thing. However before we get into our topics, I would like to bullet point a few important dates, some of which you will be very aware of, others not too familiar with, that create our twenty-first century context.

- **33 - 312 A.D.** – The church is a marginalized and persecuted people; an alternative society within the greater Roman Empire, who's allegiance is solely to the Kingdom of God and all its value, morality and principles reflect such.
- **312 A.D.** - The church is brought into the mainstream; persecution becomes history; she gains partnership and power with the government, which is something God had warned us about<sup>2</sup>
- **1095 - 1272** – The church began to look more like a military empire than the church talked about in the gospels. She was no longer the persecuted, but now the one persecuting; she no longer found strength in weakness, but in violence; she no longer ruled through serving, but force; and was no longer known for peace, but war. She had completely lost her way, and believed the values of empire were no different from the values of the kingdom.
- **1509** – The westward violent expansion of the church continued until the church of England is ruled by the King of England – The state and the church were one with one leader.
- **1776** - The United States of America was formed as an independent nation of thirteen united states, committed to a healthy separation of church and state.

- **1828** – The United “Empire” of America was being birthed, when the first "common man" was elected to the presidency, Andrew Jackson<sup>3</sup>, and the era of Jacksonian democracy<sup>4</sup> began. Nothing would stop us from becoming the most powerful nation on the earth – a nation that would weave together good Christian morals, independence, and freedom with power, greed, and advancement.

A few quick takes on these dates: (1) Ever since 1828, the church and certain parties of the government have been returning favors for the sake of self-promotion, self-protection, and authority (2) We seem to be following in the same footsteps as our predecessors Rome and Europe, and what history tells us, is that while it doesn't go well for the host country, it goes worse for the church. (3) The major difference is that the relationship between church and state were “official” marriages, if you will, and while the U.S. does not have an official church, we have what one might call a “civil union” relationship.

So, allow me to simply list a few political topics, that may seem like ‘hot’ topics to you depending on of the political parties you lean toward, and simply ask you to compare your thoughts on the issue to the thoughts of scripture, church history, and even the perspective of those who may think differently than you. As Christians it is our responsibility to be like the Bereans<sup>5</sup>, who did not take Paul at face value, but did their research to see if what he said was true. How much more diligent should we be in questioning what we know from the media through the scriptures? I believe in some of these issues, it will reveal that our value systems are in fact in alignment to the kingdom of God; while in others it may be revealed that we have competing allegiances<sup>6</sup>.

- Does our voting record show that we deeply believe every unborn child<sup>7</sup> is in fact a human being made in the image of God<sup>8</sup>?
- Does our voting show that we are empathetic to the poor, the immigrant and refugee based on the laws we approve or disapprove of that affect them and their families<sup>9</sup>?
- While many of us are avid pro-lifers between conception and birth do we stay “pro-life” for those trying to escape unending cycles of poverty, exploitation, violence and unethical governments?
- Do we first see all people as "illegal" when God refers to them as his image bearers<sup>10</sup>, and does our voting record reflect that?
- Does our voting record prove us to be individualistic Americans when we vote for policies concerning the poor, or that we honestly believe “we are our brother’s keeper”<sup>11</sup>?
- Do the values held by the candidates we vote for promote stewardship of our resources or individualistic interests<sup>12</sup>?
- Do the candidates we vote for act in a way that honors kingdom principles with our finances (responsibility) or empire advancement (debt)<sup>13</sup>?
- When it comes to issues of war and violence, how do the scriptures<sup>14</sup>, pre-empire Christian History<sup>15</sup>, and historical views<sup>16</sup> line up with our view? Do our views seem to be pro-empire or pro-kingdom?

To answer these questions in alignment with kingdom value will leave us at odds with both political parties; which, if our goal is allegiance to a particular political party then we have

the impossible task of attempting to serve two different masters<sup>17</sup>. While I cannot tell you who to vote for, what I can tell you, is that to simply reduce your involvement in these issues to a political vote is not Christian, it is empire. So, let me close this article with a few guidelines as we move closer to November 6th, 2012:

- **We can rest in God:** I wish I could say, “*if you simply vote for such-and-such candidate all will be well with the world.*” There are two problems with that: history and the sinful nature. If you go to the voting booths this November the candidate you vote for will probably break his promises for some reason; will not line up with all kingdom values; will advance the empire, or at least try; and experience as much success as failure. But the good news is, man cannot and will not thwart the plans of God, and at the end of the day, with good or with evil, God’s will, will move forward. You can rest in the reality, that all of history is in God’s hand<sup>18</sup>.
- **Do your homework:** While I recommend you look up and wrestle with every reference, book, and film I have listed, I also recommend you go beyond this. Find out what the candidates really stand for; how their ideas line up with kingdom values; and how their policies will affect, not just you, but those that Jesus seemed to be most attracted to, the vulnerable. Bottom line, no matter who you vote for, make sure you have done your homework<sup>19</sup>.
- **Pray for our leaders:** Chances are pretty high, that even if your candidate wins the election, he or she will make a move that is out of alignment with kingdom values, and pro empire advancement. One of the very elements that separate Christians from the rest of the world is the way we react toward those in authority over us. While we absolutely should disobey our authorities if they expect us to disobey the scriptures (which is not usually the case), we should still do our best to respect, obey, and pray for them<sup>20</sup>.
- **It Demands More than a Vote:** It’s easy to cast a vote and walk away. It’s much more difficult to deeply live out our votes in our daily lives. The church has a history of (this is part of being married to the empire) of voting a certain way, in hopes that we can go back to a life of self-indulgence and leave it to the empire to legislate our morality – this is not Christian. If we are willing to vote according to the kingdom and against empire values, we need to live that way as well. In other words, we need to think deeply about our values and votes and all the implications it carries, and then live deeply into those values. For example, when it comes to abortion, it has always boggled my mind that Christians can vote against abortion, yet we are not lining up outside of the abortion clinics eagerly ready to adopt the baby we demand the mom keeps alive – this is what it means to match life with votes. It confuses me, how we can vote against abortion, and then at the same time vote against the social services that help this child make a successful transition out of poverty or the foster care system - we simply want to blame them for being lazy, rather than realizing this child started his life realizing he was not wanted. This may mean we have to walk with this young mother through her pregnancy, use our resources to take care of her, and at the end be ready to help her either reconcile with the child or enter into a loving accepting community so that she doesn’t fall into the statistic of 50% repeat abortions<sup>21</sup>. This is what it truly means to be “pro-life”. When we think of voting with

these sorts of implications, are our lives truly congruent with our votes? If not, they need to be on all issues.

This short post does not do my heart justice. I love this great nation, and because I love it I will be honest about her history, her prejudice, her violence along with her successes, advancements, and the opportunities she has given to millions of men and women from all over the world. While trying to expose the nature of empire that runs through the church and the United States, we should not be silent about the good that runs through her history. All that to say, I love the Kingdom of God more and my allegiance is to it above all. My heart is that the church would live as a set apart society that lives out love, mercy, grace, justice, and truth, in the midst of the empire, in the face of empire, and for the sake of the empire. Because we love this country so much, we owe it to her to live out the values of the Kingdom of God so distinctly. So, as you go to the poles this November, I pray grace and peace on you and on this nation.

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 29:7

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 8:1-18

<sup>3</sup> Meacham, Jon. *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*, New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 2008

<sup>4</sup> Ellis, Richard E. *The Union at Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States' Rights and the Nullification Crisis*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987

<sup>5</sup> Acts 17:11

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 6:24

<sup>7</sup> Citing for millions of abortions: Jones RK and Kooistra, K., *Abortion incidence and access to services in the United States*, 2008, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 2011, 43(1):41-50.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 139:14-16; Jeremiah 1:5

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 7:12

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 22:21; Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Numbers 35; Deuteronomy 10:1; Genesis 12:1; Genesis 27; Exodus 12-40; 1 Samuel 23-24; Psalms 137; Ruth 1-4; Luke 2:7; Matthew 2:19-21

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 4:3-8

<sup>12</sup> Lev 19:9-10; Deut 15:4-5, 24:19-22; Prov 14:31, 22:7, 28:15; Isaiah 58:7-9; Isaiah 58; Amos 5:11; Micah 6; Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:34-35

<sup>13</sup> Psalm 37:21; Proverbs 22:7; Ecclesiastes 5:5; Romans 13:5-8;

<sup>14</sup> Psalm 37:7-11; Isaiah 2:2-5; Isaiah 9:2-7; Isaiah 31:1-2; Isaiah 32:16-19; Matthew 5:39-44; Matthew 10:28; Matthew 26:52; Luke 6:3; Luke 6:27; Romans 5:8-10; Romans 12:19-21; 1 Peter 2:21

<sup>15</sup> *The Early Christian Attitude to War*, by C. John Cadoux & Rev. William Edwin Orchard; *Christian Attitude Toward War and Peace*, by Roland Bainton; *Who would Jesus Kill?* by Mark Allman; *When War is Unjust*, by John Yoder; *The Peaceable Kingdom*, by Stanley Hauerwas

<sup>16</sup> *War Made Easy*, by Norman Solomon; *Nonviolence*, by Mark Kurlansky; *Less Than Human*, by David Livingstone Smith; *Beyond War*, by Douglas Fry

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 6:24

<sup>18</sup> Daniel 2:21; Psalm 75:7; Job 42:2

<sup>19</sup> Proverbs 11:14; Proverbs 15:22; James 1:5

<sup>20</sup> Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13-14

<sup>21</sup> Guttmacher Policy Review, Spring 2007, Volume 10, Number 2