



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume IX
Issue 223

God and Country

The Dangers of Contemporary Christian Americanism

by – Jon Zens and Cliff Bjork
edited by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

In recent years, a very vocal element within mainstream Christianity has been promoting a *nationalized gospel* – a gospel wrapped in an American flag. Unbiblical notions about patriotism and America’s “special” place in God’s plan abound in books, magazines, radio and TV programs produced by these religio-political zealots, as well as from their pulpits.

To equate nationalism, American or any other, with faithfulness to the gospel is a misguided perspective that can only serve to weaken our witness to the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ. When such nationalistic battle cries dominate our agenda, the true message of the gospel will be inevitably compromised, if not forgotten altogether. It is time for us to “test the spirits” that are urging us to “turn America back to God and traditional ‘Judeo-Christian’ values.”

Christ did not call us to reform our country but to spread the ONLY message that has the power to change lives. If we truly believe in the power of the gospel, we must not let it be weighed down by such unbiblical baggage.

It Goes Like This ...

The proposition that America as a *nation* occupies a special place in God’s earthly purpose (with the implication that America is better than other nations) is generally based on arguments much like those expounded in the following excerpt:

The United States is a blessed nation, founded on Godly principles by devout God-fearing men and women. From the personal writings of the authors of our constitution, we learn that they looked to God for the wisdom to guide our country’s affairs. God has a blueprint for keeping our country great and it’s found in II Chronicles 7:14.

This is typical of the kind of reasoning that is common to most of the advocates of such agendas. The problem is that it is based on alleged facts that simply are not true. It is repeatedly maintained, for example, that God’s blessing upon America as a nation has its roots in the “godly” perspectives and objectives of its founding fathers. To make such an assertion demonstrates either a complete ignorance of America’s early history or, worse yet, an act of deliberate revisionism.

Is Any Nation “Better” than Another?

The notion that America has been blessed more than other nations because of her alleged “godly” beginning is not only without foundation, but it has spawned other errant teaching as well. Building on that false premise, we are told that the divine “blessing” America has enjoyed will be replaced by “judgment” if Christians do not do their part to bring about a *national* moral reform.

(see **DANGERS**, page 2123)

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with
 - ... total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

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DANGERS (continued from page 2121)

God measures nations by their adherence to the Ten Commandments, we are told, and blesses or curses accordingly.

Psalm 33:12

*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord;
and the people whom He hath chosen for
His own inheritance.*

To apply Psalm 33:12 to the United States is totally inappropriate. It is typical of interpretation that fails to take Paul's revelation into consideration before making such an application. Prior to the gospel of the grace of God, the nation of Israel alone was the undeserving, yet divinely chosen recipient of God's special favor and blessing. All others were foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

No country on earth – including, if not especially the United States – is a “godly nation.” Nor can any geopolitical entity claim divine preference over any other. With the end of the Jewish era came the end of all such national dealings in God's redemptive purposes.

Political Activism

The very premise that believers have some kind of spiritual duty to actively participate in human campaign and voting processes begs closer scrutiny. Are we somehow obligated to join forces with those who are trying to oust the bad guys and replace them with leaders who supposedly share our “values”? The popular notion that political activism is God's appointed means for bringing “moral” reform to our country certainly has its zealous advocates, but their zeal is not based on knowledge (Romans 10:2).

For the most part, such teaching is gleaned from Old Testament passages that have not been properly filtered through the lens of Paul's Gospel. When the Old Testament is not understood under the greater light of the revelation given to Paul, it

can be a veritable mine of “proof texts” providing apparent justification for all kinds of sociological, political, or even military actions aimed at combating evil.

Why stop at merely deposing “ungodly” leaders? Using the Old Testament as our national “moral” guide, let's advocate stoning to death our unruly children, adulterers, Sabbath breakers, worshippers of false Gods, those who seek the counsel of demonic spirits, and even those who blaspheme by taking the Lord's name in vain. These are also “moral” laws included in the Old Testament canon and their execution would certainly have an impact on our society.

The end of the preceding paragraph may sound facetious, but it is not such a large step from involvement in political activism to participation in these more extreme measures. It is a line that is crossed by those who fire-bomb abortion clinics, or who attack other societal evils with similar tactics, often in God's name.

Paul provides no warrant for the kinds of political activism and disruptive protests in which believers are often encouraged to participate.

Rather than to rail against the alleged abuses of our leaders, He teaches us to humbly pray for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives (I Timothy 2:2).

Who Really Places Presidents and Kings in Power?

Those who have been influenced by the advocates of this *nationalized gospel* are often led to believe they will fail their God if they do not participate in campaign and voting processes and an “ungodly” candidate should happen to win.

The implication, if not the actual teaching, is that it is always God's plan to have leaders with the right kind of “values” in power, and when His people fail to get them elected, His perfect will for that nation cannot be accomplished.

The plan of Him Who works out everything ►

in conformity with the purpose of His will (Ephesians 1:11) is not so easily thwarted, and that includes the role world leaders play in the unfolding of His eternal purposes in Christ.

Whether a champion of good, or the very embodiment of evil (e.g. Hitler), no nation – including the United States – has ever had a president, dictator, king or emperor who was not placed in power by God's sovereign hand. And no such leader, good or evil, has ever been removed from power except as it has served God's eternal purpose.

It may have been hard to convince the oppressed Jews that it was God Who placed Pharaoh on his throne; yet, God proclaimed,

I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth (Romans 9:17).

Nebuchadnezzar foolishly boasted,

Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my might and power and for the glory of my majesty? (Daniel 4:20).

But the proud king was forced to eat grass like an animal to teach him that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes (Daniel 4:25). The lesson Nebuchadnezzar had to learn the hard way is one you and I should humbly accept:

The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men (Daniel 4:17).

While elections and other political mechanisms are the secondary causes involved in placing leaders in power, it is ultimately God Himself Who sets up kings and deposes them.

And He changes the times and the seasons: He removes kings, and sets up kings ...

(Daniel 2:21).

From a biblical perspective, the nations of the earth are the enemies of Christ's kingdom and under the irrevocable curse of eventual destruction. No physical nation is excluded from that description, including the United States. All human efforts notwithstanding, fallen men cannot achieve peace within or between nations, nor raise themselves to a righteous standing before God, for God Himself has rendered failure certain.

The Success of the Gospel

The success of Paul's Gospel has never been connected to the external moral virtues of any nation. On the contrary, his gospel has always been the most victorious in the face of severe persecution, and believers have been the strongest when faced, not with governmental approbation, but rather with oppression. We should never mislead people into thinking that the success and power of the gospel of grace depends on the moral rectitude of a nation. The power of this gospel lies in its true message, and in our boldness – in the face of any external circumstances – to proclaim that message to anyone who will listen.

Until Jesus returns, man's efforts will produce nothing but wars and rumors of wars, and we can expect that nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom (Matthew 24:6-7).

As Christ's ambassadors, we have not been commissioned to force moral bandages on a fatally wounded society, but simply to urge sinners to be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:20). Paul would not have had to look very hard to find a reason to stir up an outcry against the moral and governmental stench in Corinth, nor to encourage ousting its wicked politicians in favor of leaders with better "values," but he deliberately did neither. Instead, he went to that city resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (I Corinthians 2:2).

"Traditional Values"

To display the Ten Commandments on the wall of

a public building or courthouse suggests that they have jurisdiction over the affairs conducted in that building. It also implies a commitment to comply with and prosecute its laws. In a syncretistic society composed of those who worship Allah, Buddha, Mammon and a thousand material idols, are we really prepared to enforce the command, “*You shall have no other gods before Me*”? Are we willing to prosecute and imprison those who misuse “*the name of the Lord your God*”?

The Ten Commandments were part of an exclusive covenant with Israel. Neither the promised blessing for keeping them nor the sure curses for breaking them were offered to or imposed upon the rest of the nations, then or now.

The Ten Commandments also have no legal jurisdiction over the Body of Christ, for Christ cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross (Colossians 2:14).

The very fact that the Ten Commandments have become the common ground in this so-called “Judeo-Christian heritage” betrays a tragic paradox. As believers, we need to face the sad fact that there simply is no room for the gospel in such an alleged common heritage. To the degree that “Judeo” is emphasized, “Christian” must be suppressed. Likewise, to the degree that “Christian” is stressed, the “Judeo” part must be suppressed. The only way that “Judeo” and “Christian” elements can unite, therefore, is by adopting a common religious-political moral code – minus Jesus Christ. How can any true believer think that God is pleased by efforts to mold the United States into a society espousing a “Judeo-Christian heritage” when, to accomplish that misguided objective, His Son must be left out in order to hold its conflicting components together?

“God & Country”? or Christ’s Kingdom?

*Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the **kingdom** of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13).*

*That you would walk worthy of God, Who has called you unto His **kingdom** and glory (I Thessalonians 2:12).*

Paul does not address believers in terms of national identity, but as being “*translated ... into the **kingdom** of His dear Son.*” Those who have been baptized by one Spirit into His one Body (I Corinthians 12:13) are neither Jew nor Greek (Galatians 3:28). We have become the Body of the exalted and risen Head, Jesus Christ. On our behalf, God has placed all things under the feet of His Son and appointed Him to be Head over everything for us, the church, which is His Body (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Christ’s *present* reign does not have as its primary concern earthly nations, but rather the kingdom given to Him by His Father. Nor do His people have as their primary concern the affairs of this world, but rather the interests of the kingdom of their Lord and Savior. Their business is not to promote human national agendas, but the objectives of “*the kingdom of His dear Son*” into which we have been translated.

Whatever days God may require believers to spend as aliens and sojourners in this sin-cursed world should be spent as a living sacrifice, wholly committed to carrying out the implications of “*the kingdom of His dear Son.*”

The agenda to “turn our nation back to its Judeo-Christian heritage” espoused by so many church leaders, therefore, is not a mandate from Christ, and can only serve to deflect His people from the responsibilities He has revealed and entrusted to them.

“We’re Losing Our Rights and Freedoms”

Paul understood what it meant to follow Christ when he told Timothy,

Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (II Timothy 3:12).

Yet many Christian leaders seem to be ►

incredulous when our government does something they interpret as persecution. We need to be reminded that the vast majority of Christians throughout history have had to function under the shadow of hostile, even cruel governments. An argument can be made, in fact, that such is God's design. Under His sovereign hand persecution has often been the very instrument that has strengthened His people and spawned the spread of the gospel. Rather than to protest and complain, therefore, we should,

Rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:34).

The battle-cry to fight for our "eroding" civil freedoms, therefore, is misguided. Our civil liberties can and may be taken from us, but our gospel liberty in Christ cannot be taken from us.

As Paul well knew, a believer chained in solitary confinement is still "free" in the Lord. He is free to pray for those who misuse him and to take the opportunity to bring glory to Jesus Christ by his godly demeanor in the face of abuse. He is free not to render evil for evil and to return blessing in the face of cursing. And he is free, as opportunity arises, to feed and care for his enemy (Romans 12:20).

We must avoid the error of equating any civil liberties we may enjoy or lose with the spiritual liberty we *always* possess in Christ. When Paul wrote, "*where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*" (II Corinthians 3:17), he was not referring to civil liberties granted by "godly" governments, but rather to the truly inalienable spiritual liberties that are the inheritance of all in whom the Spirit of the Lord dwells.

Do Good To All

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men ... (Galatians 6:10).

Instead of crusading and picketing against all of the perceived evils in our culture, believers would

better glorify Christ by manifesting kindness and love.

Instead of complaining about our government's tendency to waste money on useless programs, believers should open their hearts and their purses to care for those in need.

Instead of blocking the doors (or worse) to abortion clinics, they should open the doors of their homes to pregnant women who don't need a "Pro-life" lecture, but loving acceptance and assistance in carrying their babies to term.

These are but a few of the practical ways believers can demonstrate the love of Christ instead of becoming objects of ridicule by constantly engaging in all of the negative rhetoric about how bad our society is.

To Which Political Party Does God Belong?

As we have contemplated these issues, we have become increasingly convinced that it is a serious mistake for believers to identify with any political party or "ism" in this world. Rather than showing a commitment to certain causes, or identification with a particular political party, this has the effect of compromising the effectiveness of Christ's gospel.

Political affiliations are a source of much strife and contention all over the world. Should we not, therefore, avoid unnecessary alienation by not wearing such political convictions on our sleeves?

By aligning ourselves with a particular political party, we often unwittingly alienate those who may identify with an opposing party, thus unnecessarily erecting a stumbling block that can only hinder the credibility of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Jews Paul became like a Jew to win the Jews. To the weak he became as weak to win the weak. He became all things to all men that he might save some. This he did for the sake of the gospel committed to his trust (I Corinthians 9:20-23).

*(See **DANGERS**, last page)*



Ohhhhh, how I love my *Daily Email Goodies*!! Thank you so much for taking the time to send us these wonderful messages!! – **NC**

I want to encourage you to keep writing your *Daily Email Goodies*. I am sure that the articles minister to and are a blessing to those of the “not many” category. I believe that most of us who have known the call of God upon our lives, have most likely gone the way that is common for us to be honored and accepted by man, and that is, we do our utmost to remove ourselves from the “not many” list to the list of “honorably mentioned” that would rather receive the plaudits of man than the “well done, good and faithful servant” from our Lord.

How soon it is when those of the “not many” group want recognition, honor and acceptance by their peers. Have you ever seen so many “prophets, prophetesses, bishops, apostles,” etc. than in this day in which we’re living? Then we have so many “doctors” in ministry that if one was ignorant, they would assume that Jesus must be sick!

I enjoy reading the *Bible Student’s Notebook*. It is well done. – **VA**

You are so good at making all this so simple to understand, and no wonder why I left the “organized church” a long time ago. I am glad to see you are putting all of these teachings on the real church in a book and I definitely will be ordering one soon. I was just thanking God last night for the teachers He has raised up to help us see through the deception of so many things that most of us were taught that are wrong. Resting in the Lord truly comes as we rest in

His truth. Thanks again for helping many of us see. – **CO**

I enjoy the Bible studies so much I am going to start giving subscriptions to the BSN to family and friends. – **AL**

I look forward to your email each day. You, by the Grace of God, are doing a wonderful work ...

Just wanted to touch base with you and let you know that your newsletter is appreciated. – **MD**

Thanks. This is an excellent issue. [BSN #220] – **KY**

I have really been enjoying reading your *Daily Email Goodies*. I am sure that your articles are a spiritual inspiration and blessing to many in the Body of Christ. – **VA**

I really enjoy your *Daily Email Goodies*. It is such a blessing to hear from someone who affirms what I have been learning. Thanks. – **OK**

I came into the truth of the salvation of all etc. some 15+ years ago after many years of spiritual bondage and condemnation. The more I study and meditate on God’s goodness and great plan for the eons I am overwhelmed by two facts.

1. The big picture continues to get so much more grand and glorious it is almost unbelievable (it is unbelievable except for His gracious gift of faith).

2. So few people (even believers?) want to know about it.

But some day, soon I hope, when the sons of God are unveiled, suddenly there will be a whole lot of interest generated. Keep up the good work. – **Canada**

(see **LETTERS**, next page)

LETTERS (continued from page 2127)

This [Daily Email Goodies #2231] is hard for us to understand in the carnal flesh. Basically, for what I understand ... it is imperative for us to see and know that God is in and operates through everyone. It is what it is. So, whatever is said to us ... or done to us ... is actually being done by God. We can grow with this info. Others (actually God) come into our lives in order to purify us ... to make us stronger. This means that whoever is bugging us the most ... is exactly the one we need at the time and to thank God for it. This also means that whatever we say or do to another (it may sound good or extremely bad) ... is good (God) for them. So ... we see Christ (Savior, God) in all. This does begin to eliminate judgment. It is not the flesh and blood (outer appearance) that we should be judging ... Where this gets very hard for us to understand (which is why we have to just believe it) is when we see/hear about a pedophile killer. I am reminded to what Paul said, "Our lives are but a vapor." So, for the criminals (God in them) life is but a brief vapor also ...

We cannot judge ... because in essence we are judging God. And who are we to do that? This can ONLY come about if we truly believe

DANGERS (continued from page 2126)

Even among believers, do you think political polarization would aid or hinder our willingness to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3)?

Our Confidence

Many Christians have been duped into thinking that some sort of national renewal will come if we simply get more people registered to vote, elect the right candidates in office and pass legislation in line with the "Judeo-Christian heritage."

Christian political activism is viewed as critical for the future of our country. For the Christian

that God is 100% in control. Any doubts in this ... and God is weak ... and not the kind of God I want to believe in. – **Email**

Thank you for these Goodies lately. You cannot know their impact on me at just the moment I needed them. This one gives me the hope I needed today to hang onto what God has convicted me of and pray for the time He will complete it in me and those that I love. May God continue to bless you and yours in sharing God's truths with others. – **TX**

Wow, great stuff [Daily Email Goodie #2237] – and again, very timely. God has brought many old friends our way very recently who have asked us why we no longer attend church. It is good to be reminded how long it took us to come to this peace and try to allow God to use us as He sees fit, but not to overwhelm them with all that we have taken in over so many years in "short order" and thus possibly offend them. Hard balance to keep.

Thank you again for your words of encouragement. Amazing ... Seems kinda eerie lately how your emails fit our situation for the day. Must be God, eh? – **TX** ■

to place any hope in political systems is naïve at best, and will only bring disappointment and disillusionment. Our confidence must not rest in such human devices, but in the power of the gospel to transform hearts in any culture.

The Call of Many Voices

There are many voices today calling us in many directions. Often, however, the one voice we should heed is all but ignored in the confusion raised by the various recruiters competing for our time and energy.

We encourage you to consider these issues in the spirit of the Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so (Acts 17:11). ■