

Marc Roby: We are continuing our short break from studying theology to look at some current topics of great importance from a Christian perspective. In our last session we argued that the Bible provides a Christian with his purpose, place and priorities for living. We ended by saying that Christians must use the Bible as their standard even in the public sphere. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to continue that discussion today?

Dr. Spencer: Well, I first want to remind our listeners of the verses we cited in part last time. In Matthew 5:13-16, as part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his disciples, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”¹

Marc Roby: And modern readers need to understand that in addition to being used as a seasoning, salt was the primary means of preserving meat at that time since they didn’t have refrigeration. Therefore, by calling Christians the “salt of the earth”, Jesus was referring to their influence on the culture.

Dr. Spencer: And when he speaks about salt losing its saltiness, he was speaking about salt losing its ability to act as a preservative. Some salty mineral deposits, like those along the Dead Sea, contain a number of minerals in addition to sodium chloride, which is table salt. These salty deposits can lose their usefulness if the sodium chloride is leached out of them by the rain for example. In other words, they can lose their saltiness.

I would contend that when a Christian accepts the unbiblical notion that his faith is a private matter and therefore refuses to self-consciously use a biblical standard when arguing in public, he has lost his saltiness.

Marc Roby: Now Jesus also used the metaphor of a light. Without light we can’t see the path we are taking.

Dr. Spencer: And, again, I would say that a Christian who fails to self-consciously reason and act biblically in the public sphere is failing to provide light to this dark world. The world is on the broad road to destruction and Christians are to shine the light of the gospel on the narrow path that leads to heaven.

Marc Roby: Which obviously requires that Christians be active in the public sphere.

Dr. Spencer: That is true. And being active isn’t enough, we must be active in bringing a biblical worldview to bear on the issues that confront us. According to the organization *My Faith Votes*,

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there are about 25 million professing Christians in the United States who don't vote in presidential elections.²

Marc Roby: That's an astounding number.

Dr. Spencer: It is astounding. And it is a number that could have a significant impact on who wins the next election. In his excellent book *Politics According to the Bible*, Wayne Grudem makes the point that many people, even professing Christians, accept the wrong notion that the separation of church and state in this country somehow argues against using biblical values to make public decisions. He wrote that "Using religious *reasons* to support a secular law is not *establishing a religion*."³

Marc Roby: And, of course, that phrase "establishing a religion" alludes to the first amendment to the United States Constitution, which says, in part, that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof".⁴

Dr. Spencer: That is what the phrase refers to, yes. It is interesting to note, however, that there were established churches in some of the *states* at the time this amendment was ratified. But I am getting off topic. The point is that Christians in this country have every right to use biblical reasoning and arguments in the public sphere and, in fact, I would say that they have an obligation as Christians to do so.

Marc Roby: Paul did say, in 2 Corinthians 10:5, that we are to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Dr. Spencer: And that certainly includes our thinking about issues being dealt with in the public sphere.

Grudem goes through a number of Old and New Testament examples and then draws a conclusion based on them. He wrote, "Therefore all citizens who are old enough to vote have a *responsibility* before God to know what God expects of civil government and what kind of moral and legal standards he wants government to follow."⁵ And he goes on to add, "I believe that every Christians citizen who lives in a democracy has at the very least a minimal obligation to be well-informed and to vote for candidates and policies that are most consistent with biblical principles."⁶

Marc Roby: It is interesting that he says everyone has a responsibility before *God*, not just a responsibility as a citizen.

Dr. Spencer: And I think he is completely right in saying so. And the theologian John Frame agrees with him as well. He wrote that "Christians have an obligation to vote according to God's

² See <https://www.myfaithvotes.org/>

³ W. Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, Zondervan, 2010, pg. 33

⁴ See <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>

⁵ Grudem, op. cit., pg. 62

⁶ Ibid, pg. 74

standards. And, as they are gifted and called, they should influence others to vote in the same way.”⁷

Marc Roby: I like the fact that Frame includes our obligation to influence others.

Dr. Spencer: So do I. We are called to be salt and light as we have already noted. Another good reason for pushing for laws that are consistent with the Bible is that we certainly don't want Christians to be put in the position of disobeying the civil government in order to obey God, which implies that we should influence the civil government to the best of our ability so that the laws which are enacted support biblical standards of conduct.

Marc Roby: Yes, that is certainly an issue in the medical field, in which I worked for many years. There are constant efforts to force doctors, for instance, to approve of abortion and sex-change operations, even though these procedures clearly contradict Christian principles.

Dr. Spencer: It is becoming increasingly important in many areas of life. There are many people who do not simply want to be allowed to do things others find objectionable, they want to force others to approve and participate in these activities as well.

Marc Roby: That is, unfortunately, true.

Dr. Spencer: We are also told in the great commission, in Matthew 28:19-20, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Now, it isn't just those who come to believe in Christ that we are to teach to obey Christ. God will hold everyone accountable on the Day of Judgment, so it would be cruel of us to *not* tell people what God's standards are. They may reject those standards, but we should push for them because they are what is right and good and all people will be judged by them in the end. Grudem wrote that “Believers have a responsibility to bear witness to the moral standards of the Bible by which God will hold all people accountable, including those people in public office.”⁸

Marc Roby: That makes sense, although unbelievers will certainly never agree.

Dr. Spencer: No, they won't. But that shouldn't stop us from proclaiming the truth. In addition, we have to ask ourselves a serious question; do we really believe that God will continue to bless a nation that despises and ridicules him and openly flaunts his laws?

Marc Roby: No, I think all Christians would have to admit that the Bible is full of examples showing that God will *not* bless such a nation.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. And we can therefore draw a reasonable conclusion. In order to do what is best for our nation, we must do everything in our power to prevent it from opposing God and his

⁷ J. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, P&R Publishing Company, 2008, pg. 617

⁸ Grudem, *op. cit.*, pg. 59

moral standards. That is the best thing we can do for our fellow citizens, whether they are Christian or not.

In Session 145 I pointed out that as Christians we should be asking ourselves whether or not the corona virus is, at least in part, God's judgment on our nation. It is certainly not outside of his sovereign control. And I pointed out that there are good reasons for God judging our nation. For example, I noted that abortion is the leading cause of death in this country and I also noted the existence of gay pride days and gay pride month, where people openly take pride in repudiating the biblical view of sex and marriage.

Marc Roby: And there certainly can be no doubt that God is angry with such things.

Dr. Spencer: I think that Christians need to realize that those who oppose God's standard are not at all reticent to try and force their view on us through laws and other means. We are in a war whether we like it or not. If we think that we can simply retreat into our churches and not engage with the society at large, or if we let people intimidate us into silence by saying that biblical reasoning is invalid for public debate, then we will be in serious danger of losing the freedom we have to worship God and to share the gospel as we are commanded to do.

Marc Roby: We already see that happening in many ways. The state-mandated sex-education curriculum in California, for example, is absolutely contradictory to biblical standards in many ways.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. And some of the people pushing for that program are open about the fact that they view this as an opportunity to indoctrinate our children into their anti-Christian worldview. This is a clear violation of God's purpose for government.

Civil governments exist for the good of the people. In Romans 13:4 Paul tells us that any secular ruler is "God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." This verse tells us, in a nutshell, the purpose of the state. The Westminster Confession of Faith gives a good summary of the purpose of the state.

Marc Roby: Yes, I agree. Let me read from Chapter 23, Paragraph 1 of the Confession; we read "God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates, to be, under Him, over the people, for His own glory, and the public good: and, to this end, has armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers."⁹

Dr. Spencer: That statement makes three important points. First, all earthly rulers are under God, whether they acknowledge that fact or not. Second, they are to rule for the public good. And third, they are given the power of the sword, which means both the power to wage war when necessary to protect their citizens and power to punish criminals.

⁹ Taken from R.C. Sproul, *Truths we Confess; A Layman's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*, P&R Publishing, 2007, Vol. 3, pg. 1 (with 'hath' changed to 'has')

In the third paragraph of that chapter the Confession also makes the point that the civil government has a duty to protect the church so that its officials and members may practice their religion without interference.

Marc Roby: So, to put it all in a nutshell, governments are necessary to provide order in society, which is necessary for the church to carry out its mission of evangelizing society.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And Christians have a clear obligation to do what they can to make government run properly. In a democracy like ours, that certainly means arguing for and voting for measures and people who support Christian positions.

Marc Roby: I must point out that in my experience, we often don't have any option that is truly Christian.

Dr. Spencer: Well, you are, without a doubt, right about that. In that case I would say that you still have an obligation to vote, even though it may mean holding your nose and choosing the lesser evil. Not voting is simply giving up your right to provide any balance or influence at all.

And we can't be naïve. Many candidates for public office in this country, if not most of them, in my life have claimed to be Christian. But most of them clearly were not born again. The real issue is not what the person claims, but what the person does. So, for example, if someone claims to be a Christian but supports abortion rights, and another candidate does not claim to be a Christian but says abortion is wrong, you should clearly support the second candidate.

Marc Roby: Although it is obviously over-simplifying things to mention just one issue.

Dr. Spencer: That's true, although we should prioritize issues in our minds and abortion would have to come out very near the top because it is such a clear violation of biblical law and because the consequences are so serious.

Marc Roby: Very well, do you have anything else to say about the proper role of Christians with regard to government?

Dr. Spencer: Yes. I think R.C. Sproul made a few interesting points in his discussion of the Westminster Confession of Faith on this topic. He wrote that "The simplest, most basic definition [of government] is this; government is legal force. Governments are agencies that have the power and the legal right to coerce people to obey their dictates."¹⁰

Marc Roby: I suspect a number of listeners will be disturbed at that statement, especially in our modern time of speaking about defunding the police and so on.

Dr. Spencer: I'm sure it will sound objectionable to many, which is part of why I quote it. It should provoke us to think the issue through carefully. If governments were not given the power of the sword by God, what purpose would they serve?

¹⁰ Ibid, pg. 7

Marc Roby: Well, they could still build roads and other infrastructure, but it does seem that they would have an impossible time regulating commerce or providing any other kind of function that might provoke conflict.

Dr. Spencer: And even if you think about building roads and so forth. How could they do that without collecting taxes? And who would decide where the roads or bridges or whatever should be built? Or what laws would govern the use of the roads? The more you think about it the more you realize that people are not going to agree on these things and there has to be some way of making decisions that are enforceable.

Marc Roby: Yes, I see your point.

Dr. Spencer: And so, Sproul goes on to write that “Every law that is passed restricts somebody’s freedom and exposes people to the violence of law enforcement if they fail to submit to that law. Governments must have legal force. If they don’t, they are no more than advisory committees. ... Government is necessary because of evil. Augustine said that civil government is a necessary evil made necessary because of evil.”

Marc Roby: That’s an interesting statement by Augustine.

Dr. Spencer: And I think it is accurate. The only perfect government is God’s government. He has chosen to have us live for a time in this world corrupted by sin, but there will come a time when there are only two groups of people; those who have been perfected and live in perfect peace and harmony in God’s heaven, which will be filled with joy beyond description, and those who live in hell, which will be miserable beyond description. In the meantime, God’s people are called to represent him to the best of our abilities in the countries in which he has placed us.

Marc Roby: That sounds like we are done with this topic and ready to move on to consider particular social problems facing our world.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, I think we are.

Marc Roby: Very well, I look forward to starting that next week. For now, let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. And we’ll do our best to answer.