Scripture and the Church

Beware of Hope in "Evangelical" Politicians
by Dr. Paul M. Elliott

In the long history of the world's governments there have been only a few Davids, but thousands of Sauls and Ahabs.

July 2014 – Around the world, election time is upon us. Citizens of twenty-eight countries recently voted to elect representatives to the European Parliament. Several European countries anticipate national elections within the next twelve months. Hundreds of millions recently participated in the largest election ever, in India. In my home country, primary balloting is well under way leading to the November election of United States congressional representatives and senators, state governors and legislatures, and hundreds of local governments.

I have been eligible to vote for over forty years. Every two years of my adult life I have heard self-described evangelicals say, "This election is our opportunity to turn the country around."

Former U. S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay used those very words in a recent Washington Times column.¹ But a clear-eyed examination of Scripture tells us that if evangelicals' hope is in politicians of any description, they are thoroughly deceived.
David Brat

Mr. DeLay, a Southern Baptist whose most recent "accomplishment" was being featured in a series of lewd routines on the television show Dancing With the Stars, cites economics professor David Brat, who defeated current House Majority Leader Eric Cantor in a primary election last month, as a spiritual as well as political ally.

Mr. Brat appears to be one of the most confused people of our time. Raised a mainline liberal Presbyterian, he holds an undergraduate degree from Hope College, which is affiliated with ex-Crystal Cathedral pastor Robert Schuller's Reformed Church in America. He holds a master of divinity degree from Princeton Seminary, one of the most liberal institutions on the planet in every sense of the word. He is an economics professor at the United Methodist Church's Randolph-Macon College.

Mr. Brat calls himself a Calvinist, but has converted to his wife's Roman Catholicism and is a parishioner of St. Mary's Catholic church in Richmond, Virginia. On his resumé he also lists affiliations with three other bastions of theological as well as political and social liberalism: a mainline Episcopal church, a United Methodist church, and a Presbyterian USA church.

In a 2011 article published in the journal of ultra-liberal Union Presbyterian Seminary, he advocated the merger of Christianity and capitalism which he calls "God and Advanced Mammon." Contrary to the plain statement of Jesus in Matthew 6:24, Mr. Brat believes that man can serve both. As he sees it, such a merging of the sacred and the profane would follow the noble tradition of Thomas Aquinas, the official philosopher of Romanism, whose teachings were a synthesis of Roman
Catholic teaching and Aristotle's pagan Greek philosophy.²

Electing this kind of "ally" is going to help self-described evangelicals "turn the country around"? Hardly.

**Sarah Palin**

Evangelicals' last great misplaced hope was former Alaska governor Sarah Palin, a self-described evangelical who was the Republican candidate for vice-president in 2008, and is still promoted by some evangelicals as a candidate for high office today. But what does such a person offer to "turn the country around?"

Mrs. Palin has hardly conformed to the Biblical model of wives who are "discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God may not be blasphemed" (Titus 2:5). In a 2006 interview she told the *Anchorage Daily News* that she is a feminist, and believes that no woman should have to sacrifice a career for her children.³ While she pursued her political ambitions, two of Mrs. Palin's neglected children, a son and a daughter, conceived children of their own out of wedlock. She proudly touts her daughter Bristol (who like Tom DeLay has performed lewd routines on *Dancing With the Stars*) as a heroine of single motherhood. Hardly a role model of modesty, Mrs. Palin wears embarrassingly skin-tight outfits and short skirts on the political lecture and television talk circuits, and includes sexual innuendo for "humor" in her speeches.

I mention Mrs. Palin only as an example. Many other self-described evangelical politicians have followed their own seriously un-Biblical paths. But when these issues are raised in forums on politically conservative websites, it is very telling that
the consistent response of their evangelical defenders is, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." But that misapplied statement of our Lord is not the issue. The issue is that many prominent evangelicals' lifestyles, and their followers' responses, demonstrate that they have forgotten what it means to be ashamed of sin. Israel had forgotten in Jeremiah's day, and they went into captivity. The Lord said that the leaders and people of Israel no longer even knew how to blush in shame over sin (Jeremiah 8:12) and "therefore they shall fall among those who fall." Can today's evangelicals expect a holy God to do differently with them?

**Mike Huckabee**

Another past (and likely also future) object of evangelicals' misplaced hopes is Mike Huckabee, former governor of Arkansas and candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 2008. Huckabee is a former Southern Baptist pastor who abandoned the pulpit for politics.

As he prepares for another run for the presidency in 2016, Huckabee has invited leading evangelical pastors from early Republican primary states to join him on a tour of Europe that will focus on the "spiritual leadership" of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and especially Pope John Paul II, visiting many shrines associated with his life. Obviously Huckabee is seeking to position himself with these influential American pastors as the "spiritual leader" for American in 2016, and gain the political support of these men and their churches.

It is noteworthy that Huckabee the politician has softened the rhetoric of Huckabee the pastor. In 1992 he condemned homosexuality in Biblical terms, declaring that "homosexuality is an aberrant, unnatural, and sinful lifestyle, and we now know it
can pose a dangerous public health risk.”6 But by 2007 he had backpedaled considerably, described it not as a violation of God's law but of man's "traditional views" — as "behavior that is outside the norms of those boundaries of our traditional view of what's right and what's wrong. So, I think that anybody who has, maybe a traditional worldview of sexuality would classify that as an unusual behavior that is not traditional and that would be outside those bounds."7 And by 2008 he was compromising further: "I don't think the issue's about being against gay marriage.... there is a sense in which, you know, it's one thing to say if people want to live a different way, that's their business."8

Christians who place faith in politicians seem never to sense the danger signal in such a change of position — how often politico-evangelicals "turn down the rhetoric" and slowly abandon Biblical imperatives as they seek broader electoral support. On the contrary, God commands us to "put away lying" (Ephesians 4:25). The resolve of our hearts is to be that of David:

Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore I shall not slide. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. For Thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in Thy truth. I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked. (Psalm 26:1-5)

Evangelical Hypocrisy

Often, self-described evangelicals have gotten the evils they now decry because
they voted for so-called "conservatives" who courted them with empty promises to support their moral agendas.

In my home state of Maryland, there has been a growing hue and cry among self-described evangelicals over the rise of violent crime in the areas of the state where gambling casinos have been built over the past few years. They also decry the evil of gambling itself. They cite, for example, a man who recently left his 98-year-old mother sitting in his car in the summer heat in a casino parking lot while he gambled for several hours.

Maryland evangelicals blame liberal Democrats for these evils, but they themselves bear significant responsibility in the eyes of God. They voted overwhelmingly for the governor who campaigned on a platform that included the legalization of casino gambling, pushed it through the legislature, and brought its evils to their backyards. Who was he? Robert Ehrlich, a self-described conservative Republican who openly courted the evangelical vote.

In this year's elections, many self-described evangelicals are abandoning any pretense of a commitment to Biblical truth as they prepare to go to the voting booth.

In California, Neel Kashkari, the "conservative Republican" candidate for governor that many self-described evangelicals are supporting, is a Hindu who is outspokenly pro-abortion and pro-homosexual "marriage."

"Appalling Superficiality"

Over fifty years ago, in a sermon on Romans chapter 7, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones lamented "the appalling superficiality" of British evangelicals of that time. He noted
that it manifested itself, first of all, in their lack of any serious appreciation for the power of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. He observed that it also manifested itself in their lack of any real grasp of the Biblical necessity of changed, spiritually separated lives through regeneration by the Spirit, repentance from sin, and faith in the finished work of Christ. Clear understanding of these imperatives, he rightly declared, is essential if the church is to have any real impact on society. Those who claim the name of Christ must be doers of His Word, and not hearers only. One can only imagine what Dr. Lloyd-Jones would say of evangelicals in America and around the world today.

In John chapter 6, Jesus rebuked the equivalent of today's politico-evangelicals two thousand years ago. They sought someone who would "turn Israel around" through political and economic action, rather than a Savior from their sins.

Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs [e.g., the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand], but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (John 6:26-29)

**Forgetting the Nature of the Warfare**

Today many self-described evangelical leaders in America spend much of their time
railing against politicians and the evils they have brought on the nation — mostly of one political party, although both are equally guilty. But most often their answer to this deplorable situation is not the truth of the Gospel, but "turning America around" at the ballot box by rejecting one group of politicians for another group who are equally under the sway of Satan. They seem to forget that in the long history of the world’s governments there have been only a handful of Davids, but thousands of Sauls and Ahabs.

Many Christians today have forgotten the nature of the warfare in which we are commanded to be engaged, and in our time are so often losing in the visible church:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and
supplication for all the saints... (Ephesians 6:10-18)

"No Dog In Our Fight"

To borrow a saying from the political realm, Christians need to recognize that these politicians "have no dog in our fight." They have no concept of the fact that the warfare in which Christians are commanded to be engaged is spiritual in nature. It is not a culture war. It is a war for souls. These people, natural men outside of Christ, by definition cannot engage in the warfare Christ's people are called to wage.

Instead of advocating misplaced faith in the politicians who court them with empty promises, or hypocritically offering public support to "conservatives" who in fact oppose God and His Word, Bible-believing Christian leaders must call upon those who claim to name the name of Christ to repent of the evil that they have brought upon the nation by focusing their time and attention on "food which perishes." They need to call upon Christians to instead "labor for the food...which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you." The prerequisite is that Christian leaders must repent of their own deep sin in this matter.

The American people do not need to hear more politics from the church. They need to hear the Word of God in its fullness. They need to hear the one true Gospel of God's holiness, man's condemnation because of sin, salvation from God's wrath through the shed blood of His Son, the changed life that God brings about by His indwelling Spirit, and the coming consummation of all things in Christ culminating in His promise of "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). Proclaiming that message is specialist work that only the church can
do. It is Christ's Great Commission. The church is neglecting it, wasting its time doing many other things that are not the one needful thing.

Those within the church do not need to hear more criticism of those outside the church, however deserved it may be. They need to hear that God is sorely displeased with the church's spiritual delinquency, and that "the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17). They must become ashamed of their own sin, and repent, and be about their Lord's business.

But here is the sad fact of our time: Much of the self-described evangelical church considers the last four paragraphs to be foolishness. That, for America and the world at large, is the worst danger signal of all.

**The Church's True Calling**

The Apostle Paul wrote this to correct the Corinthian Christians, when they sought to follow the world's philosophies instead of Christ:

...the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.
For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption — that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord." And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5)
True Christian Citizenship

This is not to say that Christians should neglect their duty as citizens in civic elections. But we must do so with the clear understanding of the limitations of such activities in the plan of God. God does not use human government to save sinners. He uses it to prevent man's evils from becoming even worse than they already are. Within Christ's sovereign control, this present world-system is under the sway of the Devil (1 John 5:19) and is cursed and dying. Man's only true hope is in the One who can redeem men for the world to come, "our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age" (Galatians 1:3-4).

For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.
Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless. (2 Peter 3:5-14)

In the midst of the evils of the Roman Empire, the Apostle Paul did not rail against the political situation of the time, or advocate church involvement in political action. Instead, he commended the Thessalonian Christians for this one thing:

...[Y]ou became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the Word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-10)

What, then must Christians do?

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:13-21)

References


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