



Engaging Culture

A Biblical Case for Christian Influence into Government

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STUDY 3

LIVING CHRIST, LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR

Welcome to the third session. Today we are going to move to consider the implications of God being the Creator of all, and our responsibility as Christians to share His heart and love with all mankind.

As we acknowledged in session 1, this world belongs to God. It is His, He made it, He has a plan and purpose for it. We also referred to the tragedy of human suffering, natural disasters and corrupt governments around the world. If God is in control as we saw so clearly from Scripture in Session 1, then He is concerned about the state in which we find His world. And nothing that happens surprises Him!

In Session 2, we looked at the necessity of bringing truth into the public square, in a culture and a society that doesn't seem to value or seek the truth anymore.

Today, we turn to the application and outworking of this worldview in and through our lives.

Our starting point for this session is: Genesis 1:26-28

26 Then God said, "Let us make human beings[a] in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

*27 So God created human beings[b] in his own image.
In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

28 Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

All people are created in the image and likeness of God.

One of the great enigma's of being human is both our greatness and our wickedness. No one has expressed this better than Blaise Pascal, in his *Pensées*.

"The greatness of man is great in that he knows himself to be miserable...It is then being miserable to know oneself to be miserable; but it is also being great to know that one is miserable. All these same miseries prove man's greatness. They are the miseries of a great lord, of a deposed king." (397, 398)

Christianity in fact is the only world view, the only belief system that provides sufficient answers to this enigma. The truth that all people are created in the image and likeness of their Creator, is the basis on which we can engage in His world for the benefit of all people. As Christians, we place value on life and the lives of our fellow-man because of this truth. Also in recognizing the fallenness or wickedness of mankind and the world we are compelled to engage with an attitude of grace toward our fellow man.

John Stott says, *“Christian people have a sounder basis for serving their fellow human beings (than the humanist). It is not because of what they may become in the speculative future development of the race, but because of what they are already by divine creation. Human beings are souls, who need saving for eternal life, bodies, who need caring for and providing with food, clothing, shelter etc, and social beings, who need us to become concerned for their community well being.”*¹

At this point we want to affirm that we wholeheartedly believe in evangelism, in proclaiming the good news of eternal life in Jesus Christ, and the need for people to be saved and transformed by His grace. But what we are trying to explain is that a life transformed by the gospel and living under the lordship of Jesus Christ will bubble up to become all kinds of blessing to the world.

God’s grace compels us to view and value people the way He does, to follow Jesus as our example in pouring out love and compassion, meeting practical need.

Bryant Myers of World Vision International says *“Jesus is the embodiment of God’s kingdom...Word, deed, and sign must work together as a living message, pointing to a living Lord.”*²

The following example makes the point well. A homeless woman turned to a country vicar for help. The vicar, doubtless sincere, and because he was busy and felt helpless, promised to pray for her. She later wrote this poem and handed it to a regional Officer of Shelter.

*I was hungry, and you formed a humanities group to discuss my hunger.
I was imprisoned, and you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed for my release.
I was naked, and in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance.
I was sick, and you knelt and thanked God for your health.
I was homeless, and you preached to me of the spiritual shelter of the love of God.
I was lonely, and you left me alone to pray for me.
You seem so holy, so close to God
But I am still very hungry – and lonely – and cold.*³

The powerful example demonstrates the essential role of both prayer and action!

¹ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today 4th Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), p. 54

² Bryant Myers, *Provoking the Questions: Uniting Christian Witness and Transformational Development*, (World Vision International: 2006)

³ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today 4th Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), p. 54, 55

Jesus says in Luke 6:35, *'Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked.'*

This is the God we serve and worship, and into whose image and likeness we are being transformed. And this has significant implications for how we live our lives, and how we engage in the public square.

In what is perhaps the most amazing moment in history, God became flesh. Again quoting John Stott:

"The Son of God did not stay in the safe immunity of His heaven. He emptied Himself of His glory and humbled Himself to serve... He not only proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom of God but demonstrated it's arrival by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, forgiving the sinful, befriending the drop out, raising the dead... Should not this vision of Christ affect our understanding of His commission: "As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you." (John 20:21) ⁴

Jesus said we've got to let our light shine, not hide it under a bushel. We've got to go public. Jim Wallis in "God's Politics" says *'God is personal, but never private'*.

Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ *"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.*

¹⁴ *"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.*

One of the best explanations of what Jesus is saying here that I've read is again by John Stott.

"Our Christian habit is to bewail the world's deteriorating standards with an air of rather self-righteous dismay. We criticize its violence, dishonesty, immorality, disregard for human life, and materialistic greed. "The world is going down the drain," we say with a shrug. But whose fault is it? Who is to blame? Let me put it like this. If the house is dark when nightfall comes, there is no sense in blaming the house; that is what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is 'Where is the light?' Similarly, if the meat goes bad and becomes inedible, there is no sense in blaming the meat; that is what happens when bacteria are left alone to breed. The question to ask is 'Where is the salt?' Just so, if society deteriorates and its standards decline, till it becomes like a dark night or stinking fish, there is no sense in blaming society; that is what happens when fallen men and women are left to themselves,

⁴ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today 4th Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), p. 54, 55

*and human selfishness is unchecked. The question to ask is 'Where is the Church? Why are the salt and light of Jesus Christ not permeating and changing our society?' It is sheer hypocrisy on our part to raise our eyebrows, shrug our shoulders or wring our hands. The Lord Jesus told us to be the world's salt and light. If darkness and rottenness abound, it is largely our fault and we must accept the blame."*⁵

Salt must be applied if it's going to be of any use (ie. preserving meat, or adding flavour). Salt is no good in the salt shaker, it must be poured onto the meat. In the same way we need to be involved in our world and the issues it faces. Salt only has the necessary effect on its environment if it is both distinctive from it and yet fully involved in it.

If we're going to be the salt of the earth, we must remain salty. If we're going to be the light of the world, then we must continue to reflect Christ in the way we live. We are his body.

If we lose our saltiness, if we are not living the righteous lives that God requires of us, we effectively lose our saltiness and become good for nothing. Our testimony will be trampled underfoot by men.

Proverbs 11:11

"Upright citizens are good for a city and make it prosper, but the talk of the wicked tears it apart."

Charles Colson writes: *"If we're tempted to ignore the great moral issues of our day, or dismiss them as "just politics," we are betraying our biblical mandate and our own heritage. Nothing could be deadlier for the church, nor for the culture, since real Christianity invariably provides a healthy influence on society."*⁶

The jurisdiction of politics today seems to cover an ever-growing number of societal areas. For example, it covers such areas as the poor, immigration, refugees and asylum seekers, widows and orphans, the economy, civil and criminal law, infrastructure, education, health, and on and on we could go.

There is so much injustice, hurt and pain in the world.

John Hayward from the Jubilee Centre in the UK, says *"In the 21st century the state now dominates so much of our lives we also have to be concerned about political policies. For political policies affect so much of our lives for good or ill, and it is sentimental to think we can care about others whilst remaining indifferent to a factor which affects people in such major ways."*⁷

⁵ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today 4th Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), p. 85

⁶ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/august/11.64.html>

⁷ http://www.jubilee-centre.org/blog/288/faith_in_politics

Stott puts it this way:

“If we truly love our neighbours, and want to serve them, our service may oblige us to take (or solicit) political action on their behalf.”⁸

William Wilberforce is a great example of this. Rather than keeping his faith out of his politics, as so many are urged to do today, it was precisely because of his faith, and his belief that all people are created equal in the image of God, including black African slaves, that he devoted his life to the abolition of slavery.

We can see that there is no shortage of Biblical mandate, indeed command, for involvement in alleviation of suffering, action promoting social justice, and insisting on proper care for the weak, the voiceless, the disadvantaged and the marginalized.

This is what’s exciting. It’s not about us! Even though people don’t realize it, bringing the Christian worldview to bear in the world shows people a truer picture of what it means to be human. It is actually for their benefit, even though they don’t see it that way. It’s about love for our neighbour.

Jesus Himself is the greatest example. Along with the proclamation of the arrival of the Kingdom of God and the consequent urgent need for repentance and faith in Him, He “went about doing good”, healing the sick, touching the leper, praying for the foreigner’s family, spending time with the disdained and the unwanted.

James 2:17-18 *“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe-and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?”*

As Christians, we are called to engage at both the ‘social service’ and ‘social action’ levels. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation arrived at this helpful distinction between ‘social action’ and ‘social service’⁹

Social Service	Social Action
Relieving human need	Removing the causes of human need
Philanthropic activity	Political and economic activity
Seeking to minister to individuals and families	Seeking to transform the structures of society
Works of mercy	The quest for justice

Generally, the church tends to lean towards involvement with the social service responsibilities and challenges which is vital and very important, but perhaps we need to be more aware of loving our neighbor through ‘social action’. Once again,

⁸ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today 4th Edition*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), p. 36

⁹ LOP 21: Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment (1982: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation: World Evangelical Fellowship), p. 34

William Wilberforce was involved in both of these causes, resulting in unprecedented change for good. You will have a chance to explore this further in a moment.

“They came first for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up.”¹⁰

Martin Niemoller (colleague of Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

May we be a people who speak up for others, who work for the well-being of others, who demonstrate love for our neighbour even when political action is required. Let it never be said of us, there was no one left to speak up.

In last weeks’ discussion we looked at how we needed to bring God’s truth into the nation and community. This week we need to discuss specific areas of public policy in which we need to more specifically be the salt, and how we as Churches and individual Christians might do that.

¹⁰ http://hubpages.com/hub/Martin_Niemoller