

POWER AND PURPOSE

By

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When men saw the great powers Jesus possessed, they readily proposed that He become their king. Their purpose was to free themselves of Roman occupation and build a prosperous, sovereign nation where they could exalt Israel and debase the Gentiles. They envisioned a Messiah with power to put down all wrong, control all their enemies, get rid of all wrong, get rid of all diseases and supply them with all things.

Christ refused to be their king and to exercise His power in an earthly kingdom. (Contrary to pre-millennial doctrines which teaches that He could not become king because the Jews rejected Him. The fact is they rejected Him after He refused to be king and began teaching the truth about spiritual citizenship). He refused to exercise His power for the wrong purpose. There is no reason to think that He has changed His mind and is now going to put His disciples in charge of all political and social affairs of the world as some seem to think.

For a long time Christians refused to have anything to do with social problems and politics, seeking rather to separate the “spiritual life” from all responsibilities in the social realm. In recent years, however, there has been a growing realization that God is concerned with all of life; everything is related to God either positively or negatively. First we saw a great emphasis on “social action” by liberal groups, who often came out on the side of Marxists, to the detriment of the faith and of society. Now we are being urged by conservatives to mobilize the church for the purpose of taking control of politics, economics and all the rest to insure the dominion of Christ.

“Dominion Theology” is derived solely from the mandate given to Adam before the fall. It did not apply to the Patriarchs, to the nation of Israel (Israel was not to have dominion over the world, only the prescribed area given it) nor to us who are under the new covenant. Where did Jesus ever suggest that His disciples were to try to take dominion over any nation?

We search in vain for any apostolic precedent for using the church as a political force. The church is seen throughout scripture as a remnant, as a minority, as a people without worldly power, as the suffering and persecuted body of Christ. Its purpose is to present the Gospel of Christ, to shed the light of God’s eternal purpose upon those groping in the darkness and confusion of earthly goals. This purpose is accomplished in individual faith and obedience to the Lord and by exposing every facet of life to the light of Christ. Christians should use the voting privilege and due legal process as do other citizens, but we have no mandate to attain power to force anyone else.

History teaches that power corrupts, even when it is the power of the church. For example”

1. In 325 AD, when the emperor Constantine declared Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire, the church immediately began to assume a powerful role in government which led to the murder of “heretics” and the persecution of all who had convictions contrary to those in power. The church made “converts” at the point of a

sword and scripture was set aside in favor of church tradition. The entire populace was subject to the whims of the religious hierarchy.

2. When the reformers broke the power of Rome, they proceeded to set up their own power-structure patterned after Catholicism, without the Pope, but with their own hierarchy and temporal rulers such as Calvin, who became the dictator of Geneva, and was more to be feared than revered.

3. The New England Puritans didn't have such a sophisticated hierarchy as that which existed in Europe, but nevertheless while they were in political power they managed to persecute all who disagreed with their concept of a "heaven on earth." In every village where they had power to do so they forced their own scruples upon all the people. Church attendance often demonstrated fear rather than faith. In some places it was against the law to smile in church, or to kiss your wife in public.

And what of the ambition of the "Moral Majority" and the vast number of citizens who would like to see the church rise in power in this country? In this case we do not even have to wait for history to be written to see the threat offered by some who seek power. Mr. Falwell of the Moral Majority has already declared that all who do not support the atheist state of Israel are under God's curse, and that the purpose of our nation is to protect this small Zionist state with its imperialistic designs.

Many are convinced that the church should take the reins of power in government and force everyone to live like a Christian whether he is a believer or not. They would turn the church into a political machine with power to coerce the politicians. Such power requires the weight of great numbers, since those who seek earthly power rely on human strength rather than on Christ. To gain such numerical support the message is tailored to please ears that itch for sensationalism and emotional satisfaction, worship becomes entertainment and fellowship is geared to political aims rather than to God. Political oriented evangelism seeks to bring about the results of Godliness without God, and produce the results of Christian faith without the faith.

The apostles were willing to use only one means of getting converts: the truth of the gospel. In the history of apostolic evangelism, there is a noticeable absence of any incentives outside the message than brings man to know the purpose and demand of the Creator. The healing miracles were to confirm the word, to prove that the new and revolutionary message was from God and not of human origin.

By contrast, modern evangelists, seeking numerical strength, use every trick and device they can invent as means of gaining "disciples" without their having to undergo the spiritual exercise of reasoning with God and bringing their minds around to the objective truth He reveals.

Christ did not offer His power for the purpose of creating utopian conditions and circumstances to make life simple and carefree for His disciples. What He offered is the power to be His disciple in spite of the prevailing conditions and circumstances.

His purpose is not to remove all the obstacles to a life of ease and give us instant victory, but rather to transform us by having us pass through the refining fires of trials and tribulations. "Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake" (Matt. 5:11). "If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). His power is there to sustain us in the hardship, not to do away with all hardship. Such was His own

experience. “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8).

The purpose of God is to bring each of His children to His own image through faith and willing obedience. A mark of that faith is to recognize that it must be refined the fires of adversity and that to be a partaker of Christ’s sufferings is a cause for rejoicing (I Peter. 1:7, 4:13).

Let no one take these remarks as an excuse for neutrality. A Christian cannot be neutral where truth and falsehood, right and wrong, justice and injustice are concerned. But the role of the Christian is to serve, not to rule. According to Jesus, His company will always be in the minority. The power is not in numerical superiority with earthly power, but in the truth. “The truth will make you free” (John 8:32). Our task is that of “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (II Cor. 10:5).

The Christian has a duty to uphold truth, which includes justice, but he must not owe his loyalty to human powers or political parties, nor depend upon them for the work of God to be accomplished.

Is Christ not concerned with the material? Indeed He is — He created it — but the New Covenant command is that we seek first God’s Kingdom and righteousness, and the essential things will follow (Matt. 6:33).

The non-Christian is chiefly interested in preserving his life, his investments, his personal liberty and the things that please himself, and he will use whatever power is available to accomplish his goals. The Christian is chiefly concerned with serving God and pleasing Him.

God has sufficient power to accomplish His purpose through the truth. The more His power (in the truth) is yoked with the various powers of men, the less effect it has to bring about real spiritual transformation, and the result is a “form of godliness” without the power of God.

The basic issue for all people — slave or free, rich or poor — is whether or not they are in covenant relationship with God through the gospel of Christ. It is the church’s business to make known this gospel. As long as the church seeks to use its power to gain material benefits and social blessings it will fail to accomplish its main task.

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