

Can Consistent Christians Mingle In Politics?

“Men are apt to think that this world is as God made it, and that all things continue as they were at the creation, only that man has made great progress in prosperity and civilization. Now, in material comforts, none will deny it, though the men of a past age would hardly think our refinements comforts. Men have telegraphs, railroads, automobiles, and airplanes;* but I hardly know in what respect they are the happier for it. It is a question if they have not excited the passions more than they have satisfied them. Children are not more obedient, families not more united, employees not more honest and respectful. Morally speaking, I do not see what the world has gained. It thinks better of itself, and vaunts its powers: I do not know that this is any advance. Christianity, as light come into the world, has made a difference. Men do not do in the light what they do in the dark. But the world is in no sense as God made it. He overrules all, has patience with it; but He never made it as it is. He made paradise, and the world has grown up as it is through man’s departure from God. It has been destroyed once since because of its wickedness.

“What is the world? It is a vast system, grown up after man had departed from God, of which Satan is actually, though not by right of course, the god and the prince. It is a system sprung up, in its origin, from man’s disobedience and departure from

* Men have much more now than in the day when this was written, but the truth contained herein is only the more clearly perceived as the true character of the system of this world is more vividly portrayed and the technology of man is vastly increased.

God, and which has turned God out of it, as far as it could, when He came into it in mercy. It is also a system in which men have been proved in every way. Without law, it became so bad God had to destroy mankind, save eight persons, by the deluge. Under law, man plunged into idolatry. God sent His Son; Him they slew and hanged on a tree.

“And when we look at the principles and motives of the world, are they other than the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life? Do not pleasure, gain, vanity, and ambition govern men? I do not speak of exceptions, but of what characterizes the world. When we speak of men rising in the world, getting on in the world, is it not ambition and gain which are in question? Is there much difference in what Cain did in his city, and what men are now doing in theirs? If a Chinese who had heard a missionary speak of Christ and Christianity came to a “Christian country” to see what it was, would he find the mass of men, the world, governed by other motives than what governed the masses in his homeland of China? Would they not be seeking gain, as he would have done there, or pleasure, as they do there, or power and honor, as they do there? What is the world in its motives? A system in which men seek honor one of another, and not the honor which cometh from God only.

“Take Christendom as a whole, and what do we see? Islam has overrun the eastern part, and Romanism the western. The north of Europe and North America have been delivered from the latter; and what is their state? Overrun with infidelity and popish tendencies. I do not mean to deny that the Spirit of God is active, and that good is done in the midst of all this. I believe it and thank God for it. But that is not the world; it is a distinct power which works in the midst of it.

“It is important to remember that it was at the death of Christ that the devil received the title of *“prince of this world”* and, as to his religious influence, he is called the god of this world, who blinds the minds of those who believe not. God did not call the devil the prince of this world until He had fully proved and tested it. But when it followed Satan wholly in rejecting His Son, then the name is given to him. When the true Ruler of the world was rejected, then it was plain Satan was its prince.

“In the world the eager pursuit of gain is more ardent than ever, leading to less scruple in acquiring it. Pleasure also holds its sway over men in defiance of Christ as it did when there was no such motive to restrain them. War rages as it ever did; conquest and oppression range over a wider sphere than of old; while the nominal power of Christianity with all men’s boastings has receded to smaller limits than in the seventh century when it ruled over known Africa, filled Asia and was almost the established religion of China.

“The world, then, has been evil from its origin; for the horrors of idolatry cannot be denied. Christianity, then, has been corrupted by man, and has not reformed the world—is actually the seat of its greatest corruption. Commerce, a partial civilizer of men, absorbs them with the lowest of motives—money—and is wholly indifferent to truth and moral elevation: for it, a good man is a man with capital. Education, which also frees from what is gross, has not, with all its pretensions, changed the motives nor ameliorated the morals of men.

“Such, then, is the world, which is attached to its own objects—grandeur, power, pleasure, gain—not to Christ; and thus it is enslaved to him who governs the world by these motives.”

—J.N. Darby

Such is the world as vividly described by an eminent servant of Christ, and it is to the government of this world that Christians are invited, nay urged, to come and assist. We are urged to help make its laws, to help choose its rulers, to hold office, to mingle in that department of its activities which it freely acknowledges is one of its most evil and corrupt. We are told that Christians ought to be interested in the government of the country to which they belong; that they should take part in politics in order to purify them; that they ought to vote; that they should help to put good men in power, and to pass better laws; that they should hold office themselves and use their influence for good.

But what saith the Scriptures? Can we serve the countries in which we live by taking part in their politics, consistently with our character as described in the Word of God? Let us see:

In 1 Peter 2:11 we are called “strangers and pilgrims.” Do strangers take part in the government of the country in which they sojourn? Or do pilgrims make laws for the country through which they pass? Surely not. Likewise, in 2 Corinthians 5:20, we are called “ambassadors for *Christ*.” An ambassador has no part in the government of the land in which he serves, but rather represents his own country that sent him, seeking its best interests. Are we, then, any less truly foreigners here because it is heaven that is the land of our citizenship (Philippians 3:20), and the saints are our fellow citizens? (Ephesians 2:19). We are told repeatedly in God’s Word (John 15:19; 17:14,16, etc.) that we are “not of the world,” that is, that we are no part of its system. We must needs come in contact with the world-system as long as we are in the world; but this contact is not *fellowship*. We are to be in the world, but not of it (John 17:16,18). We are to keep ourselves unspotted from the world

(James 1:27), for “the friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

What was the attitude toward politics of the Lord Jesus Christ, who left us “an example, that we should follow His steps?” (1 Peter 2:21). Did He take any interest in the political government of His country? Did He assist in putting into power the civil rulers of Palestine? Did He help reform bad laws and make good ones? Did He take any part at all in politics? No; His conduct was the very reverse.

“In His days the last shadow of Jewish liberty departed and His country was oppressed beneath the iron gauntlet of Rome. Such a state of things would have thrilled and agitated to its core the breast of the independent citizen, the lover of liberty. In the Gospels we gather only the political changes of the land from the most distant hints of the narrative.

“When occasions occur on which, if politics be right for the Christian, the Saviour must have declared Himself, He uniformly puts them aside. One of His hearers beseeches Him to engage his brother to divide an inheritance with him (Luke 12:13). Jesus refuses to listen to the matter or exercise even the lowly power of an arbitrator. ‘Man, who made Me a judge or divider over you?’ If the Christian’s duty is to take the office of judge or divider, Jesus would have taken it, as our perfect example of what is right; but He thrusts away with a firm hand the political element of the question, and only warns the disciples against covetousness.

“John the Baptist, His own forerunner, the greatest born of women, is slain through the arts of an adulterous princess, and by the orders of an ungodly king. How does Jesus meet the event? Does He lift up His voice against the oppressor and

murderer? No. John is imprisoned, but Jesus speaks not of the injustice; he is murdered, but He utters no cry against the cruelty or tyranny of Herod. John's disciples came and took up the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus. "When Jesus heard of it, He departed thence by ship into a desert place apart" (Matthew 14:10-13). John's followers announced it to the Lord and He was silent.

"Take another incident. There were present at that season some that told Him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1). A politician would have been on fire at this national outrage. Religious antipathies met with political. Here was a field whereon to inveigh against Roman cruelty and to rouse the Jews against a tyranny that trampled on the true religion. A pagan profaning with bloody hands the worship of the true God!

"What is Jesus' reply? 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.' The politics of the question are wholly passed by; the moral and spiritual view of the matter is alone regarded. This is a special, a most decisive case. Doubtless it made the blood of every native Jew boil with rage; but Jesus drops no word of indignation against the governor's crime, nor applauds the Galileans as martyrs for their country.

"A question is raised by His countrymen, and referred for His decision—whether it was lawful to give tribute to the Roman emperor or not. This critical question must have drawn out the politician. Involved in it lay the right of the Romans to rule Judea, and impose taxes at their will. The oppressions of the governor were before His eyes. The caesar that swayed the sceptre was profligate, cruel, a murderer. Yet He bids the Jews pay tribute even to an idolater, and though the emperor might apply the money to the support of idolatry.

“Jesus, then, was not a politician. Am I a disciple of His? Neither, then, am I to be one. ‘It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master.’ If Jesus did not intermeddle in civil government, it is because such conduct would not be pleasing to God. Jesus neither acted politically Himself, nor sanctioned it in others. To be engaged in politics, therefore, either as an actor or a speaker, is no part of my duty as a Christian, else the character of Jesus is not perfect. But His perfection is my pattern, and therefore it becomes me to refuse, as pointedly as He did, to mingle in politics.” —F.W. Grant

These, the words of another devoted servant and follower of Christ, speak plainly enough, and cannot be refuted. It is said, Christians are the very ones to be in power. But “*the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not*” (1 John 3:1). Our lives and the world are governed by different principles entirely. The best the world’s law knows is justice. We who stand by mercy before God should be merciful; and the Scriptures are our guide. But as one of the world’s philosophers truly said, “Nothing would excite greater manifestations of contempt and disgust than the slightest attempt to introduce the authority of Scripture in a political consultation.” And this in a so-called “Christian” land.

If it be insisted that Christians are peculiarly fitted to serve the governments because of their superior goodness, we answer, God has ministers of His pleasure who never sinned—the angels. A striking instance of their service is given in Daniel, chapter 10. For three full weeks Daniel, his faith sorely tried, continued in fasting and prayer. The angel of God had said, “Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thy heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard.” Nevertheless, the answer of God by

the angel did not arrive until three weeks after.

Then the angel relates to Daniel how this happened, and the difficulties he had to encounter. It was a question of deciding something at the court of Persia; and those there, who were opposed to an edict for favoring the Jews, could put obstacles to its promulgation. The prince of Persia was opposed to the Jews, but at the end of twenty-one days the angel prevailed against his counsels and came back to Daniel. Thus we learn that if God does not use us as His instruments in politics, He does use some from His legions of angels.

And sometimes He uses the basest of men. Little did Caesar Augustus know, when he sent out the decree that “a census should be made of all the habitable world” (Luke 2:1), that he was merely an instrument in the hands of God. Yet so it was. More than seven hundred years before, the prophet Micah had said in the name of Jehovah, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel.” But Mary’s home was at Nazareth, in Galilee, and the time was drawing near for the birth of her holy Child; and lo, God constrains the Roman emperor to set the machinery of his empire in motion, that Joseph be compelled, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to go up unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem. What a proof that God still holds the reins of government in His hands and that He turns the hearts of men whithersoever He will!

What then is a scriptural attitude for a Christian toward the governments of the world? To submit to them, and to pray for them. We are to pay taxes and submit “to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (1 Peter 2:13); and we are to pray for “kings and all that are in authority” (1 Timothy 2:2). We are

not to despise governments nor to speak evil of dignities; nor bring against them railing accusation (2 Peter 2:10; Jude 9).

If, then, we refuse to mingle in politics, it is not that we think politics in itself wrong, but that we belong to another country, that is, a heavenly (Hebrews 11:16); and we see that the world is evil (John 17:15), and rejects the One we love. We wish to be separate from it therefore, and to cast in our lot with *Him*. We are drawn upward, above and beyond this scene, by union with Christ on high; willing to be despised, yea, rather to suffer shame for His name, while we wait for Him to come and take us to that city from whence we shall go no more out.

—E.V.W., Reprinted from *Help and Food*, 1912.

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By studying the Scriptures themselves, we learn how believers stand before God (their position) and what they should be occupied with (their activity of life). When we discuss voting for the Christian, we need also to see what our God has made us to be as His children. What we are in Christ determines how we should live (every activity in life). In order to see God's truth here, we need to view the following verses objectively with open minds. To save space I will quote just a few such verses, but many others not quoted are also important in the context.

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you ... because they know not Him that sent Me.... He that hateth Me hateth my Father also.... Now they have both seen and hated

both Me and My Father.... They hated Me without a cause.... The Comforter shall testify of Me ... and ye also shall bear witness” (John 15:18-27).

“The men which Thou gavest Me out of the world ... they have kept Thy Word.... I pray for them: I pray not for the world.... I have given them Thy Word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from (out of) the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth. As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world” (John 17:6-18).

“We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not (continues not in sin); but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. And we know that ... the whole world lieth in wickedness (the Wicked One)” (1 John 5:18,19).

“Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.... Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice. Pilate saith unto Him, What is truth? (John 18:36-38).

“For our conversation [“citizenship,” Greek—*polituma*] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).

“God ... hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:19,20).

“These all died in faith ... and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

First of all, what is the world? The world is the society

that fallen humanity lives by while rejecting God in all of its endeavors. It is one Godless system that is universal on earth. It encompasses every political persuasion and crosses all political boundaries. Its source is Satan. The Lord Jesus Christ pronounced God's judgment upon it just before going to Calvary (John 12:31).

The world hates both the Father and the Son. The world hates His redeemed ones. The Father gave to the Son His redeemed ones from out of the world. The Son has chosen His redeemed ones out of the world because they do not belong to the world. God in His omnipotence has separated believers out from the world and in His grace made us to be "in Christ." We have been sanctified (set apart) unto Christ by the Word which is Truth. We have life eternal and we are not under judgment like the world. In every way, like Christ, we do not belong to this world. We are not "of the world." Therefore, the world hates us just as it hates the Father and the Son. This is our position before God and the world. We are in Christ and we do not belong to this world.

Now we must ask: how is this truth to be demonstrated while we serve our Saviour God in this world? Well, the Son has sent us into the world, just as the Father sent Him into the world. But, if He has separated us from the world unto Himself, why would He then send us into it? Why did the Father send His Son into the world? It was to be the Saviour of the world. There was abounding evil when Christ came into the world and He worked in the midst of it in bringing souls to God. He did not attempt to reform the godless Roman government, the then present world system, and He did not purge out the evil of the world in order to relieve suffering. Rather, He won the ultimate victory over Satan by His own

sufferings on Calvary through His death on the cross, which victory stands for eternity.

But for what have we been sent into the world? What character of work done by us would be a testimony to the world that “we are of God,” that we have no part in this present evil world and yet have love for the souls of mankind? “The word of reconciliation” has been committed to us; the preaching of the gospel of the glory of Christ is this work, and loving one another by walking together in love and truth is work of the same character. It is in this character of work that the consistency of the truth is seen, that we are not of this world just like Christ is not of this world. By this is seen the truth that we are ambassadors for Christ, that our citizenship is in heaven, and that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

But if we, in our work for the Lord, resort to a method of the world like politics, then our testimony to the Lord becomes flawed. Our vote, each vote no matter whose on whatever issue, is a voice in how the world should operate, isn't it? But our citizenship is in heaven. God has called us out of this godless world, not given us a voice in it! We may believe our vote is for good but in the course of events in the political system it may become support for evil that can easily follow. Our good intentions can be turned to evil, for this world lies in the Wicked One. Are we ignorant of his devices? Remember, too, “all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” These are the very foundation of this godless world which is passing away. But “the love of the Father” is the governing principle of the believer's life. See 1 John 2:15-17.

Ultimate victory by our God over sin in this world will be achieved. This is certain. When our Lord Jesus appears

in glory, He will then bring down God's judgment upon this world, which He pronounced before His death on Calvary. But while the Church is on earth the evil will not be diminished. None of us, nor all of us together, can defeat Satan nor even weaken Him in any way whatever. NO. But we know he has been defeated by the Lord on Calvary because we are saved from judgment and enjoy fellowship with God. But Satan's defeat as to his present efforts in the world will come only by the Man in Glory and not by us, not even a little bit. How fitting it is that the One who so suffered will overcome every enemy and all evil! How glorious it is that we shall share with Him in His glory in that day!

May our God help us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May He help us to grow in wisdom so that we may clearly see what is our present individual testimony before Him and the world, so that we may go on with much more fruitful work for the Lord.

—Byron Crosby, March 2000

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Very Dear Brother,

I write a line in haste, having at heart the course of the brethren with regard to these elections which are about to take place. I found that the brothers at V. had scarcely reflected at all on the bearing of an act which was making them take part in the course of the world. Thanks be to God, from the moment when that was presented to them they saw the thing, and, I hope, clearly. This has led me to think that perhaps the brothers near you may not have reflected upon it either. It seems to me so simple that the Christian, not being at all of this world, but united to Him who died and rose again, has

no business to mix himself up with the most declared activity of the world, by an act which affirms his existence as belonging to the world, and his identification with the entire system which the Lord is about to judge. I think the truth has only to be presented in order to be acknowledged by those who have understood their position (of not being of the world); so much the more that the world ... [is] more really near the great catastrophe which is about to fall upon those who rise up against God. Oh how my soul longs that His people should be separated to Him, and even with understanding of what is awaiting the world, and still more of what they ought continually to await themselves! May God give the grace to be faithful in bearing this testimony everywhere, according to the door that He will open, in season and out of season; for His own, so dear to Him, need it.

Events are hastening on, dear brother, and yet as to us we are waiting for but one, that our Beloved, our Saviour should come. His coming becomes a resource, as it has long been a joy to us, and a reality still more precious, and more dear. May we expect it continually; God alone knows the moment. The Christian takes cognizance of the events which are taking place, as a testimony to the one who understands; but his thought, his desire, his portion, is much more within the sanctuary than all that. But is it not true that this voting, as an act of identification with the world (in the very forms which it assumes in the last days), ought to be avoided as a snare by all Christians who understand the will of God and their position in Christ? Always true (I have been acting upon it for twenty years), it is doubly true now.

May peace, grace and mercy be with you, dear brother, and be multiplied to you, and may the presence and joy of

the Lord be with all the brethren who surround you. Salute affectionately all the brethren.

P.S. I think that in Philippians 3:20,21, the way in which we wait for Jesus Christ as Saviour, is to deliver us finally from the whole course of this world, such as it is. "For our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens, from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory, according to the working of the power which He has even to subdue all things to Himself" (JND translation).

Montpellier, March 24, 1848.

—From the *Letters of J.N. Darby*, Vol. 1

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"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:6-8).

If Christ is our life, let us walk in Him, the heart not getting out of this sphere which belongs to the new creation. You must all know, if you know anything of your own hearts, that double-mindedness is a great snare, even in the most sincere. We are constantly surrounded with that which belongs to the old man. I am not talking of sins. Take an unconverted man—his heart is like a highway for everything that comes before him in the world. That is an extreme case, but for us there is the danger of distraction, politics, all the things going on around us. If the heart is not living in the sources of strength, it is double-

mind—I do not mean in will, but that which determines the conduct of a Christian is not there; it is not the straight and narrow way for his heart, but that running through his mind and heart which saps the spiritual strength, and the Manna is light food for him, not sweet as honey, but light food. Such is the danger of distraction, and so he says, “Beware.”

The world has its principles, its rudiments; and all these things that distract us belong to the world’s estimate of things, and we do not suspect danger. People are talking of things around, and we are drawn into the ordinary conversation, and we come out with the consciousness that we have been unfaithful to Christ, and our spiritual strength is weakened.... A glorified Christ on high is the testimony that the world would not have Christ, and it goes on with its own rudiments and principles. Look at the prayer in Ephesians 3—what infinite blessedness! The poor world has nothing of that, and there you get the sphere of life.

—J.N. Darby, from *Collected Writings*, Vol. 31