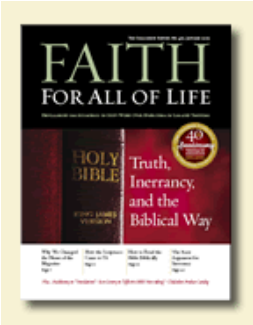

After the Resurrection

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> *That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* (Phil. 3:10-11;13-14)

There is a lot of confusion today regarding how Christians should function in the realm of politics. The political left and some concerned Christians accuse those Christians who are active in this realm of some sort of messianic goal of "saving" society through politics. If we sought to replace the power of the Christian gospel to regenerate a lost soul with anything human, their concerns would be well founded. However, those encouraging words from the Apostle Paul to the Philippians tell us that a lot should happen in the life of a Christian *after*he or she experiences the new birth. I believe that Christians should and must be involved in politics, but we must remember that no good will come of our political activism if we do not understand and operate in the "power of His resurrection."

What Is Government?

First and foremost, Christians are the only people who can restore the proper Biblical understanding of government to our modern system. Whenever I discuss this with young people, I use a word association game that psychiatrists, our modern day witch doctors, use in some of their therapy sessions. I explain that I am going to say a single word and ask them to remember the *first* word, thought, or phrase that comes to their mind. I draw their attention to the front of the room and then simply say "government."

Next come a series of questions: "How many of you thought about something relating to yourself?" I am yet to have a hand go up on that one. Next I ask, "Who thought of something relating to their families?" I usually get a few hands here and often it has to do with what civil government is doing to harm the family. Next I ask, "Who thought about the church?" and again few hands are raised. Finally I ask about civil government, our federal, state, or local governments; this is where most of the hands in the room are raised.

I do this exercise to illustrate how out of touch most Christians are with what the Bible teaches about government. Living in the modern world, we are taught that the word *government* is synonymous with civil government and everything else has only to do with our private lives. Buying into this lie, most Christians practice a false piety focusing on personal holiness, family, and church while largely ignoring the political realm. From the Bible, however, we learn that there are several major types of government, starting first and foremost with self-government. Biblical Christians do not advocate the sort of top-down controls that liberals suggest to handle the problems of society. Instead we preach the Good News of the gospel that changes hearts one at a time. Today we have sadly forgotten that those of us who are saved are to live in "the power of His resurrection." Obviously this resurrection power should have a great impact on how I govern my own actions as I learn to worship God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love my neighbor as myself (Mt. 22:37-39). Of all the areas of government, we find the Bible has the most to say about self-government.

However, the Bible also has much to say about the smallest and most fundamental unit of human organization, the family. Not only does the Bible establish the family as the normative structure for rearing children and taking dominion over creation, but it also has much to say about how it is to be governed.

Bible-believing families are instructed not to forsake the fellowship of the saints, and thus we have churches. And, yes, the Bible has a lot to say about how they are to be governed as well. When we study the Scriptures, we should notice that almost everything that deals with rearing children, education, caring for the sick, providing for the poor, and the general building of character is centered on one of these three Biblical governments. The civil government should have a very limited role to play in these matters and yet in the past two hundreds years of our nation's history the civil magistrates have taken, or been given, more and more control over these important duties. Biblical Christians should be on the forefront of restoring the proper Biblical balance.

So, what would be left for the civil magistrate to do? Plenty! The civil government is responsible for the defense of our nation; it is meant to protect us and our families from enemies foreign and domestic. The civil magistrate is responsible for maintaining social order and enforcing Biblical commands such as "Thou shall not steal" and, of course, the civil magistrate is the only government that God entrusts with the power of the sword to punish crimes like murder and kidnapping. The civil magistrate is responsible, as our Declaration of Independence so eloquently states, for protecting our God-given rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (or property)." It is not the magistrate's job to tell us what is or is not good for us to purchase or at what price; it is their job to maintain justice: A Biblical civil magistrate would establish a free market where the laws protect private property and require men to be honest in their dealings and faithful to their contracts.

Civics 101 and the Resurrection

So just what does this Civics 101 lesson have to do with the resurrection? It goes back to what Paul was trying to teach us about living "in the power of His resurrection." To illustrate, reflect on the story of an earlier resurrection that was discussed in chapter 11 of the Gospel of John. Jesus' friend Lazarus had died, and before going to his tomb, Jesus waited a full four days to make sure that everyone knew that Lazarus was indeed dead. This helps us really understand just how "dead in trespasses and sins" we were before God gave us faith and called us forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. However, the story does not end with Jesus' command for Lazarus to come forth, but continues with further instructions to others who witnessed Lazarus' resurrection. There is a lesson here that I hope and pray many pastors and teachers will reflect on carefully and prayerfully. It would have been pretty incredible to see Lazarus obey Christ's command to come forth, to see him stand up off the stone and come out of the tomb, grave clothes and all. But then Jesus turned to those who were with Him and said, "Loose him, and let him go."

The Christian life is not just about getting saved and looking forward to the rapture or heaven! What Paul wants us to do is take new Christians, loose them, and let them go so they can live in the power of Christ's resurrection. After Lazarus was loosed, he continued to minister to Christ, but found himself, as most of the early Christians did, a target of persecution with the Jewish leaders wanting him back in the tomb!

Pastors and leaders need to take off the old grave cloths of the world from about those in their flocks and teach them to be disciples who are willing and able to live in the power of Christ's resurrection, conforming to Biblical teachings and confronting the world in all the areas of government discussed above. Will this be messy and controversial? You bet it will: "Where no oxen are, the trough is clean; but much increase comes by the strength of an ox" (Pr. 14:4). I would suggest that in many Christian circles today, we are spending far too much time making sure the barn is clean and criticizing anyone who messes it up. Instead we should be rejoicing in all the work that is being done by those Christians who have been properly instructed and let loose to "live by the power of His resurrection," even if we have to clean up a few of their messes.

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