

CHRISTIANS AND POLITICS

PROVERBS 29:1-27

***JESUS SAID HIS KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD.
THEREFORE, RENDER TO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR'S
BUT RENDER TO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S.***

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CHRISTIANS AND POLITICS

PROVERBS 29:1-27

This morning's text ends this next section of the book of Proverbs. It started in chapter 25 and it ends with the conclusion of chapter 29. Further, we said that most scholars think that this section in particular was written for the education of Israel's future leaders: their future political, religious, and academic leaders. In fact, there are scholars who feel that the entire book of Proverbs was meant to educate leaders.

However, as I have preached through the book, I have tried to generalize these Proverbs by applying them to all of our everyday lives. After all, we all find ourselves at one time or another in a leadership role, whether it be in church leadership, at work, or even as parents.

Until this morning, I have for the most part avoided the strictly political nature of these Proverbs. However, this morning I will address their political ramifications. The text addresses such issues as the public life, conduct, and attitudes God expects of politicians. But remember, the text still applies to us.

Right up front I need to tell you that I stand in a very small minority of modern Christians in the United States. So as I preach, you need to make sure that what I am saying squares with the text. You need to listen to this morning's sermon with a great deal of skepticism. Those of you who know me, know that I really don't have much respect for politicians. In fact, I would cringe if one of them, any of them, would say, "John is my pastor and Devon Church is my church."

In the military, I had a strange group of friends that consisted of chaplains and doctors. We used to go out to lunch and all of us were pretty cynical towards government. One morning at breakfast, the doctors got into this debate about which was the better surgeon. The first doc said, "A man came to me who had his hand cut off. I reattached it and today he is a concert violinist."

The second surgeon, not to be outdone said, "That's nothing. A guy came to me with his leg cut off. I reattached it and today he is a marathon runner."

I'm fairly sure that the poet is not that hard on politicians

I know that the majority view of Christian leaders and people today is that we have a moral obligation to vote and to be involved in politics. In fact, many Christians actually believe that our country was founded on Christian principles and somehow they have come to think that we are, or at least at one time were, a Christian nation. And further, most of these Christians actually believe there is a "Christian" candidate to vote for.

Let me just state some facts up front. Most of the framers of our *Declaration of Independence* and *Constitution* were not Christians. They were Deists at best. They were not common people. They were rich landowners, most of whom owned slaves.

Secondly, our judicial system has no interest in justice. Our judicial system is based on a "game" with rules. Whoever can play the game better, wins. It has no real interest in getting at truth.

Thirdly, in order to get into a government office, stay there, and be effective, a person must be willing to compromise. It is virtually impossible to get into government without money. That money comes from huge special interest groups such as drug companies, oil companies, major corporations, and unions. And take note of this. These lobbyists support both the Democratic and Republican parties. There is almost no candidate out there that comes to office without owing someone something.

Next, let me put these Proverbs in their historical context. This section started in chapter 25 by informing us that this group of Proverbs was called, *Proverbs of Solomon collected by King Hezekiah's men.* Kings Solomon and Hezekiah started out well, but ended poorly. They did not live up to the wisdom described in the book of Proverbs. Solomon ruled around 950 BC, Hezekiah ruled about 690 BC, and the kingdom collapsed about 586 BC. If we read through the Kings and the Chronicles in the Old Testament, it becomes clear that there are only the briefest of times that there are godly kings, godly prophets, and godly priests.

That brings me to the second piece of historical data. It seems as if human beings were never designed or equipped to rule over one another. In Genesis, God gave human beings dominion over the Earth, the waters, the plants and the animals. When Israel demanded their first king, King Saul, God made it very clear that their demand for a king was a direct rejection of Him as their King.

So if we take a look at the history of God's people Israel, it seems as if we were never created or equipped to rule over one another. It seems that if we were to apply the criteria of good leadership described in the Proverbs, we could say there was never a sustained period of time in all of human history where this type of leadership existed.

Finally, before we get into this morning's text, let's take a look at the historical context of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. They lived under a governmental system much like ours. In fact in some areas they were better than we are, in other areas they were worse. Jesus and Paul never got involved in politics. They lived under the laws of Rome and never encouraged political activism. Paul and Jesus both made it simple. Obey the law and pay your taxes. Now to be sure both of them taught a lifestyle for Christians that was certainly counter-cultural, and to be sure their message was counter-cultural. However, they were more interested in how Christians live rather than changing politics.

The Bible makes it clear, and the point is made in this morning's passage, that immoral leadership will bring chaos and ultimately bring destruction to its own country. I know many people in our country are absolutely terrified of terrorism. But the fact is terrorists will not destroy our country. We will crumble from within. Our leaders have consistently led us down a road of moral decay.

These are simply historical facts. Israel disintegrated from moral decay. The Roman Empire fell as a result of moral decay. The United States is imploding due to moral decay and the system is already so tainted, there is no turning back.

So I think my position is this. Let the government do what it is going to do. We the church, the people of God, must do what we must do; follow God and build His Kingdom. Remember, Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world.

Here is what is so distressing for me to see. Christians talk about voting as if it were their moral Christian duty. Yet, they cannot agree on which candidate to vote for. If it were so mandatory for us to vote as Christians, then it seems to me that there should be a clear choice on which way to vote. But when you hear Christians argue about who to vote for, they are diametrically opposed. How can that be? I think as we study through this morning's passage, you will come to the conclusion that none of our political leaders, most of our civil rights leaders, and many of our church leaders do not even come close to living up to God's standards for leadership. I think the church needs to go back to being the church.

The main idea of this morning's message is this. **JESUS SAID HIS KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD. THEREFORE, RENDER TO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR'S BUT RENDER TO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S.** In other words, obey the laws, pay your taxes, and pray for our leaders. However, as a church, instead of trying to pass all sorts of moral laws, we would be better served to live out a Christian morality ourselves. These days, there is a lot of time, money, energy, and emotion spent on trying to make sure homosexuals cannot get married. The argument is so that we can preserve the sanctity of marriage. The sanctity of marriage? The divorce rate among Christians is as high as it is in the secular culture. So called Christian people are involved in pornography, on-line computer affairs and all sorts of other deviant sexual behavior. Who cares what non-Christians in our society are doing when we the church are not living out the sanctity of marriage. You husbands out there, do you really love your wife like Christ loved the church? Does your marriage really demonstrate the mutual submission that the Bible commands? The chances are that most of the marriages in the Christian church are really screwed up marriages. If that's the case, how can we even begin to talk politically about the sanctity of marriage?

I. WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS THRIVE (VS 1-14)

*Righteous Leadership Provides An Atmosphere
Where People Can Become All God Created Us To Be.*

Since it is pretty clear that I think righteousness can only happen in the context of the church, let us see what verses 1-14 say about what happens when the righteous thrive. The poet's proposition is this. **RIGHTEOUS LEADERSHIP PROVIDES AN ATMOSPHERE WHERE PEOPLE CAN BECOME ALL GOD CREATED US TO BE.** In other words, leadership is not about power and control; good leadership is all about empowerment.

A. RIGHTEOUS LEADERS (1-4)

Verses 1-4 describe righteous leaders. Verse 2 is the key verse that dominates this section and it is meant to parallel verse 4. Verse 1 is meant to parallel verse 3. Do you see how they leapfrog one another?

First let's look at verses 2 and 4. Why do people rejoice when they have righteous leaders over them? Because they feel that they will always be treated fairly. Why do the people groan when wicked people come to power? Because they know that the rich and powerful will be able to control the leaders by giving them bribes. In Illinois, and particularly in the city of Chicago, we read everyday in the newspapers of the new indictments coming down. We see how many city officials were involved in taking bribes and extorting money. I think it is no secret that Chicago politics are extremely corrupt. There is big money to be made so the politicians that control the most money have the most power.

Verses 1-3 describe the nature of righteous leaders. Righteous leaders are not interested in power. They are not arrogant or headstrong. They are humble and morally upright. They find themselves in direct contrast to the arrogant, stubborn immoral politicians who are driven by a lust for power and sex. No matter how pious politicians say they are, if you were to match their positions and behaviors with Scriptural truths, you would find that they really don't pass the test for God's truth. For us as church leaders, we are to be humble, morally upright, pure and fair.

B. WISE ADVISORS (5-12)

Next, rulers can be judged by the circle of people whom they surround themselves. Verses 5-12 demonstrate that righteous leaders surround themselves with wise advisors. The climax in this section is found in verse 12. Dishonest rulers tend to attract evil subordinates. State and Federal government attracts those who are interested in power and money. In verse 5 we can see that the politician is surrounded with "yes" men. But in the end, that leads to a downfall. Good leaders, first of all, tell the truth and expect those around them to tell the truth. Good church leaders surround themselves with people who think differently than they do and who are not afraid to state their positions. We have seen corruption at the state level in Illinois. One by one, a new official is being indicted, and it looks as if the former governor himself will be indicted in the near future. Corruption and dishonesty breeds corruption and dishonesty.

Look at verse 7 because this is where my views on politics and so-called civil rights activists are developed. Although there are many authentic civil rights leaders, there are many so-called civil rights leaders who are opportunistic and operate out of self-interest. God is concerned about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern. Let me give just one example. There are many, but I will just take one issue. The Chicago public school system is horrible. There are a few good schools to which the wealthy and privileged families send their children. But for the most part, poor families are forced to send their children to gang infested sub-standard schools. I am not going to mention names but you can easily find them. Powerful politicians in the city of Chicago and so-called civil rights activists insist that we pour more and more money into the school

system. They say that will solve the problem. But when more and more money goes into the system, the money goes directly into politicians' and administrators' pockets. Money doesn't go into the classrooms or to teachers. Now here is what I want you to think about. Those of you who live here in the city and have to send your children to these schools seem to have no choice. Now a real civil rights activist or an honest politician would see the solution to the problem is to institute the voucher system so you would have a choice. If you had the option to send your child to a Catholic or Protestant private school, you would know that there would be order, safety, and fairness at the school. Your child wouldn't have to worry about gangs at school and you could be sure there would be morals and discipline taught. You would then have a chance at getting your child a quality education.

But the politicians and the so-called civil rights activists say that we must not do that because the public schools may not be able to survive. They extol the benefits of the Chicago public school education. But if you were to just see where they send their children to school, you would find that they all go to private schools. They want to send their children to private schools but they don't want you to send your child to public school. Listen, politicians and these so-called civil rights leaders want to keep the poor people down and dependent on them. That's the way they stay in power.

Look at verse 8. Doesn't this describe these so-called civil rights activists and these so-called freedomfighters? They go around stirring up cities with all sorts of nonsense. They are very good at sounding noble, but if you were to examine their message, it is, *?I want to keep you down so I can have a job.?* You see if we all got along someday, these people who preach and stir up hate would now be irrelevant. Look quickly at verses 9-11. They stir up trouble, they fill our court systems with the stupidest cases, and they want to fuel the hatred between the races, when in actuality, it is the politicians and the civil rights leaders keeping all races down economically. These leaders don't want racial reconciliation because once the races are reconciled, everyone will see that the problem all along has been government and some of the disreputable civil rights leaders.

In the church however, pastors and leaders are here to enable people to be all God created us to be. If we foster an atmosphere of love and fairness, our church will be characterized by a concern for justice for the poor. I know many of you are tutoring students for free. I know that many of you are helping one another buy food and pay rent. You see, the government is so corrupt that they will never help the poor because their jobs and power depend on the poor staying poor. On the other hand, good church leaders are continually trying to work themselves out of jobs. We are identifying, training, and raising up new leaders to take our place.

C. JUSTICE FOR ALL (13-14)

And look at verses 13-14. How can you tell if the leadership is righteous? If there is righteous leadership, there will be justice for all. Racial reconciliation will never happen in our society but it should be happening in the church. The poor and the downtrodden will never find justice and dignity in society but they should be able to find it in the church. The politicians and the so-called

civil rights leaders have worked at this one goal together. They want the rich to look with contempt on the poor. They want them to identify the poor as the drain on society. And at the same time they want the poor to look on the rich with hate. They are made to believe that the rich are rich at the expense of them being poor.

That should never happen in church. Look at verse 13. There is a double meaning here. First, the rich and the poor need to understand that they are to look at one another through God's eyes. We are meant to interact with and love one another. God made us both. The rich should not feel they have more power in the church because in reality they are called on by God to serve and help the poor. The poor should never feel like second class citizens in the church because they need to contribute with their talents, abilities, and their spiritual gifts to the building up of the body. Secondly, since God created the eyes of both the rich and the poor, He wants us to know that He sees everything that goes on between the rich and the poor. Look how serious this is. God will bless churches that model righteous leadership. They will prosper. But the news for secular government is less optimistic. Verse 14 states that if a king is fair to the poor, his throne will always be secure. Government plays politics with the poor. There are no politicians that are concerned with truly helping the poor find justice. That means that our form of government is not really that secure. **RIGHTEOUS LEADERSHIP PROVIDES AN ATMOSPHERE WHERE PEOPLE CAN BECOME ALL GOD CREATED US TO BE.**

II. WHEN THE WICKED THRIVE (VS 15-21)

Wicked Leadership Hinders People From Living As God Created Us To Live.

Verses 15-21 describe what happens when the wicked thrive. The sad truth is this. **WICKED LEADERSHIP HINDERS PEOPLE FROM LIVING AS GOD CREATED US TO LIVE.** We were created to love God and one another. We were created to serve God and to serve one another. Power and control are the tools of abuse, whether it is physical, verbal, emotional or economic abuse. Power and control are the tools of political abuse as well.

A. NO MORALS (15-18)

Verses 15-18 remind us that wicked leadership has no morals. Look at verse 16. When wicked leadership is in power, sin thrives. Just take a look at our society. We make a huge issue out of homosexual marriage, yet we teach homosexual behavior as a legitimate, alternative lifestyle. Again, let me point out the leapfrog connection between the verses. Verses 15 and 17 state clearly that if we teach our children immorality, they will act immorally. We encourage young people to explore their homosexual side. We teach kids to have sex. Our government protects all sorts of pornography. Just take one hour, watch and listen to music videos on MTV. They promote perverted sex and violence towards women. And we wonder why there is an A.I.D.S. epidemic, why date rape is so prevalent, why STDs have become a real problem, and why young people are angry and becoming more violent.

Look at verse 18. Many of you learned this verse when you were young. We used to translate it, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." That is a good translation. But it is even more explicit than that. Here is how it can be translated for today. "Where the politicians have no interest in following God's revelation, the people run wild, casting off all restraint." Many government officials are immoral and are living immoral lives. The courts are passing laws that are directly contrary to God's moral laws. The judicial system has repeatedly shown that if you have enough power and money, you can get away with any crime. The courts have made it a right to kill unborn babies and even partially born babies. With the government so immoral, so far away from God, of course the people run wild. Please don't hide your head in the sand. Don't be fooled by politicians' pious talk. Just stand up and tell it like it is. Our politicians, our leaders, our judges, our so-called civil rights leaders are corrupt, they are evil, and they only have interest in oppressing others so they can maintain their power positions. They are immoral and not concerned for the things of God.

B. NO ACCOUNTABILITY (19-21)

In addition to being immoral, verses 19-21 remind us that there is no accountability among them. Look at verse 20. Politicians really don't have convictions. Oh, this is what they say, "I have personal religious convictions, but they won't stand in the way of serving as your politician." Huh? What does that mean? If you have personal religious convictions, then you will always live by them. Politicians say what the people want them to say. Their goal is to get elected. Look at verses 19 and 21. If you let workers get away with things at work without really disciplining them, they will sooner or later become uncontrollable, and there will be nothing you can do about it. From the very beginning, Washington D.C. made sure they were above the law and untouchable. One of the things that might help our country is to have a third party system. But Democrats and Republicans have made it, continue to make it, and will always make it impossible for a third party to rise. There is absolutely no accountability in government. Oh, they appear to argue with one another and criticize one another and moralize about one another, but in the end, they will stick together to ensure a two party system. Please, just take time to examine what comes out of politicians' mouths. They are simply speaking to get votes, and stay in power and control.

On the other hand, good Christian leadership makes one of its highest goals, accountability. Christian leaders must learn to speak and receive the truth in love, with one another and with the congregation. You can depend on me to preach from the pulpit what I believe the Bible to be saying. And those of you who know me, know that I really don't sugar coat anything. There is a lot at stake. **WICKED LEADERSHIP HINDERS PEOPLE FROM LIVING AS GOD CREATED US TO LIVE.** Wicked leadership really is all about keeping people down and oppressed. Righteous leadership is all about setting people free so they can pursue righteousness.

III. WHEN GOD THRIVES (VS 22-27)

Since There Has Never Been, Nor Is There Now Christian Leadership In The Secular World, The Church Should Be An Example Of What Living Under God Truly Looks Like.

Again, we will all be judged. Verses 22-27 point to a time when God thrives. Hear me out. **SINCE THERE HAS NEVER BEEN, NOR IS THERE NOW CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IN THE SECULAR WORLD, THE CHURCH SHOULD BE AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT LIVING UNDER GOD TRULY LOOKS LIKE.** This is my bias and this is where you will have to evaluate my message for yourself according to the Scriptures. Worldly government has always been and will always be corrupt. Like I said before, racial reconciliation will never happen in society. Too many people and politicians are prospering from racial division. The poor will never find justice and never find fairness in society. Again, there is too much money to be made off the poor's misery. It is a waste of time, money, energy, and resources to try and to politically reform the country. Besides, we belong to a kingdom that is not of this world. We belong to Jesus Christ. He is my King and my Lord.

A. THE CHAOS OF WORLDLY LEADERSHIP (22-24)

Verses 22-24 reinforce the concept of the chaos that comes with worldly leadership. Because of racial hatred, institutional racism, economic prejudice, politicians are able to stir up hatred and dissension. They are proud and arrogant. And look at the chaos our judicial system encourages. There should be a fear of lying in court. In ancient Israel, if you lied in court for a criminal, you would get the same sentence. But now, there is not really any pretense of looking for the truth. All of the talk centers around how the lawyers handled the case, not about the guilt or innocence of someone and certainly there is no talk about justice for the victims. How can anyone watch the nightly news and not see how chaotic our society has become? That is a direct result of wicked leadership.

B. THE ORDER OF GODLY LEADERSHIP (25-26)

On the other hand, verses 25-26 describe the order brought about by godly leadership. Look at verse 26 because I think this is pivotal for our understanding of how we are to exist in this culture. Don't be running to get in bed with politicians. Be careful of who you are supporting for office. Don't look for government to bring about justice. Look to God for justice. And verse 25 is a command to us as God's church. Don't fear men or threats from government. We are to continue to build God's Kingdom, God's way. There should be no racial, economic, or gender discrimination in God's church. There should be no one starving in God's church. We should be encouraging one another to contribute to the building up of this church. We are to be God's testimony to society, the government, and our neighborhood as to what a just society looks like. Our existence should be a threat to politicians and fake civil rights leaders. We should say to them, "Do you want to see what the sanctity of life looks like? Come to Devon Church. Do you want to see what racial reconciliation looks like? Come to Devon Church. Do you want to see the poor cared for? Come to Devon Church. Do you want to see what godly leadership looks like?"

Come to Devon Church. Do you want to see what God's Kingdom looks like? Come to Devon Church." If we are truly a prophetic voice, and if we live out our faith, you can be sure politicians and so-called civil rights leaders, and even churches, will notice us and hate us. But remember verse 25 says that we are to trust in God and not fear man.

C. RENDER TO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S (27)

I think there is a clear choice this election season, but it is not for any candidate out there running for office. Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, but verse 27 commands us to render to God what is God's. The problem is that we have become so comfortable in the world that we can no longer separate what belongs to God and what belongs to this world. This is not a Christian nation. It never was and it never will be. Obey the Laws. Pay your taxes. Pray for our government. If called to serve in the Armed Forces, you need to make that decision for yourself. I served two terms, one active duty and one reserve duty. I don't care if you vote or not. Vote for whomever you want to. But never forget that the whole system is hostile to God's kingdom.

Spend your time, money, and energy in promoting God's Kingdom. Let us be about the business of setting people free from the bondage of sin, Satan, fear and death. Let's bring this neighborhood and our individual neighborhoods the Good News of salvation. Let's feed the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick and welcome the strangers. Let's show the world what God's Kingdom looks like as they look at us. Let us never give anyone the impression that we have put our hope in worldly governmental systems. Our hope is in Jesus and Him alone. This is what I believe. **SINCE THERE HAS NEVER BEEN, NOR IS THERE NOW CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IN THE SECULAR WORLD, THE CHURCH SHOULD BE AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT LIVING UNDER GOD TRULY LOOKS LIKE.**

I don't want to give the impression that I am anti-American. As far as world governments go, I think we live in the best country going. However, having said that, I must quickly add that we are in no way a godly or moral nation. We must never forget where our citizenship is. **JESUS SAID HIS KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD. THEREFORE, RENDER TO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR'S BUT RENDER TO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S.**

Now to be fair, I'm pretty sure that my friend Paul Koptak, doesn't hold as extreme a position as I do, so when I quote from his book, I don't want to give the impression that this is his position. But I do like the way he summarizes this section.

"Others, such as Robert Webber, believe the church does well to recover the ancient tradition of standing separate from the world and condemning its evil practices by refusing to join in, identifying with the world by participating fully in all that does not require compromise, and seeking transformation by living as countercultural witness. For Webber, the role of the church is not to change the world but to be the church."

I think that is the position that I hold personally.

However, Paul goes on to say,

"While Christians will debate the most appropriate role for church involvement in matters of state, the vision of wisdom that permeates every level reminds Christian readers of the kingdom of God, which, like salt that preserves the world, clings insistently to a vision of peace and prosperity for all. In that way, the proverbs about the king's rule look beyond the successes and failures of human kings like Solomon and Hezekiah to the rule of Christ: 'Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness' (Ps. 72:1). As the representatives of this king, the church will find ways to teach, correct, and support families and governments in their teaching for good and in their restraint of evil."

As God's children let us not try to change the world. Let us be His church. Our mere existence should be a rebuke to secular government and wicked leaders.