

Friday, February 27, 2009

CHANGING THE COUNTRY

Many Evangelicals have their heads in the sand or blinders over their eyes these days. They are interested only in their "personal relationship" with Jesus and quite willing to let the President and Congress shape the future of our Country. Other Christians actually believe that what is happening is wonderful because they believe it is the responsibility of Civil Government to provide for education, welfare, health care, banking, housing, jobs, energy, biotechnology and our waistlines, too. Some Evangelicals do not know what the Bible says about any of these things but agree with warnings and solutions being offered by conservative, but secular, radio and TV hosts and writers. It is inconceivable that God has not revealed His will about all of this. It is inconceivable that He has no Word to guide us as citizens through the turmoil which engulfs us these days. It is inconceivable that there is no Scripture to help us formulate public policy and by which we can analyze our new President's initiatives.

What are Biblical Doctrines and Values that should influence Politics? The following is a short, broad sketch from a neo-calvinist perspective. The Concept of Sphere Sovereignty is crucial to Neo-Calvinist Political Science. The Bible teaches that God created people in His image. They would be like Him and they would represent Him. He gave them a mandate, as His representatives, to care for and cultivate all that God had made. This is known as the Cultural Mandate. As part of this plan, God ordained three institutions. First is Marriage (defined as the life long covenant commitment of a man and a woman) with the consequent extended family. Married couples and families are to work together to keep the Cultural Mandate. Second, God created the Covenant Community, which became the Church, and third, God created Civil Government. Each of these three institutions, known as a "Sphere", is autonomous, but under God- responsible to Him. One Sphere is never to interfere with or usurp the authority or sovereignty of the other. This is known as Sphere Sovereignty. There are extensions of the Marriage-Family and Church Spheres, which become other, secondary institutions in society, i.e.-voluntary associations of individuals for work and the production and distribution of goods and services (Business and Trade). Other voluntary associations will naturally arise for Education, Communications, the Arts and Recreation. None of these Spheres are autonomous, but cooperate with each other. Each is meant to function according to the Law of God and is accountable to Him. There are serious consequences of this Doctrine of the Spheres and Sphere Sovereignty. For example, the education of children is the right and duty of their parents. The State can never rightfully (in God's eyes) claim that those children belong to it or that it is the State's right and duty to educate children against the will of their parents. Parents are not to acquiesce to this claim by the State or relinquish their privilege and duty to educate their children. In practice, this Doctrine leads to the support of Home Schooling, Parochial Schools and the use of Vouchers to use tax money for school choice. At the very least, this Doctrine should lead Christian parents to become involved on local school boards and in the selection of text books, as well as leading Christians to become professional educators, who will promote and teach Biblical values in State schools, which most children attend. The Family also has the responsibility to teach work or vocational skills, as well as the Biblical work ethic. People who do not work do not eat; but more than that, working is a God-given duty, a commandment, laid upon all to support themselves and their extended family. This is a major way to carry out the Cultural Mandate and thus serve God. The State has no business to interfere with this duty or to care of those who shirk it.

This Doctrine of the Spheres gives the responsibility for welfare and the care of the sick, the widowed and orphaned, the unemployed and the homeless to the Family and Faith Community. The State has no business to interfere with or usurp these God-given responsibilities either. Calvinists oppose the concept and practice of the "welfare state" and the liberal ideology behind it and are very suspicious of all entitlement programs and oppose the popular entitlement mentality. The State has no right to take money (taxes) for most such programs (at the most, such axes should be minimal) That would be compounding error with theft.

The voluntary civic associations are not to forgo their independence and look to the civil government for support. These groups, whether for business or the arts, are extensions of the Family and Church. Again, the State has no right to interfere with them in any way. In practice, this Doctrine leads to a rejection of "tax breaks", as well as government funding and subsidies. In our Society, it means advocating for privatization of just about everything. The Faith Community or Church has its God-given privileges and responsibilities which include public corporate worship and evangelism, as well as its ministries of charity. The Civil Government has no lawful right to abridge or interfere with the Church in its duties. The only legitimate, God-given responsibility for Civil Government is maintenance of Law (involving Legislation in harmony with the principles of Biblical Law) and Order, (Law enforcement, Courts and a legal system guaranteeing due process- as well as the Military) all to maintain peace and to protect citizens from harm and danger from any quarter. Taxing the people for this is not theft. It is the obligation of citizens to pay for these services. Civil government is not autonomous, nor is it to be of the People, for the People or by the People. It certainly is not meant to be of, by and for those who govern. Civil Government is of God, for God and according to the Law of God. It is

accountable to Him in all things. It will be judged by Him. Neo-Calvinists, being in the Reformed Tradition, also hold to other Doctrines which greatly influence their politics. Prime among them is the "Total Depravity" (Radical Corruption) of Human Beings. This leads to the emphasis on the negative role of the Civil Government. Because people who rule are also fallen sinners, there is among all Calvinists a serious mistrust of all those in power and of any particular government Administration. One consequence of this is the strong advocacy by all Calvinists of a division of powers, wherein there will always be a system of checks and balances to inhibit the government from becoming an instrument of evil. Finally, because we hold to the infinite value of the person, Calvinists also believe in the necessity of the consent of the governed to be governed and the right to rebel when such freedom is denied and human beings are enslaved. This means the Reformed Christian is very much concerned with the possibility of totalitarianism, in which the State becomes God and takes over total control of the minds and lives of its citizens. Thus, we are very much opposed to an ever growing government and in favor of an ever decreasing government presence in our lives and business. This, of course, flies against all the current trends and practices of our Government and the desire and beliefs of most of our politicians and citizens today, especially the so-called Progressives and Left-leaning Liberals among us who are now in control (Spring 2009). The State is not to interfere with the life and work of the Church and the Church has no business doing the work of the State (this is the original intent of the First Amendment). However, the Church, in its prophetic preaching and teaching ministry, has the duty to remind the State of its responsibilities under God and of His judgment upon it when it fails in them. Apparently, the church also needs to teach its members the Biblical function of Civil Government! Changing the Country must begin with changing the Church.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 14:50

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

THE SHACK

One of the most popular "Christian" books ever is "The Shack". Many churches are using it for discussion groups during Lent. Evangelical Pastors I know think it is wonderful and highly recommend it. Reviewers are ecstatic in their praise. Many claim the book has radically changed their lives for the better. However, it is full of serious unscriptural teaching and should be read, if at all, with a prayer for spiritual discernment.

Many who wouldn't recognize the beliefs and values of the so-called Emergent Church will find them in the pages of this book. Solid believers will begin their reviews saying, "I know there are yellow flags and I have serious problems with the doctrine in the book", but go on to say, "nevertheless, I love the book and found it so freeing." That is the word used often. In the book, as in the Emergent Church literature, relationships trump doctrine. What is most important is love, acceptance, affirmation, forgiveness and reconciliation. They find all of that in this book and that is what really matters to those who love the book, even if it is unsound in its teaching about God, the Trinity, Salvation and the Scripture. (What does that say about people in general and contemporary evangelicals in particular?) Here is an excellent, extensive review of the book that should serve as a guide if you are spending time in the Shack.

http://www.challies.com/media/The_Shack.pdf

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:40

Tuesday, February 24, 2009

WHY I DO NOT DO ASHES

My wife and I enjoyed pancakes and a good time with friends at our church last night, but we will not be attending the Ash Wednesday Service tonight. We do observe Lent and part of that of course is remembering our sins and our mortality. That is what is behind the use of ashes- we were created from the earth. When we are buried we return to the earth. Clergy say "Ashes to ashes" and sprinkle dirt on our caskets at the grave. Remembering that, ashes are smudged on the foreheads of worshipers during the Ash Wednesday Services. This is the symbolic beginning of a period of Lent which includes fasting, self denial and spiritual discipline in preparation for Good Friday. All of that is beneficial (it is like Advent before Christmas). The ritual is not a Sacrament or Ordinance. It dates back to maybe the 8th Century. The use of ashes as a sign of sorrow or repentance, however, is found in Scripture.

Isaiah 58:4-6 (New International Version) 4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? 6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

Receiving ashes is a tradition in Catholic type churches. We have known innumerable Roman Catholics who go to get their ashes sometime during the day and then wear them at work. To us, this has always seemed like a ritual done by people as, at best, just something that they do out of religious custom or obligation. Knowing these co-workers, the act never seemed to be evidence of contrition or repentance of sin or awareness of mortality, let alone the beginning of a period of self-denial. Of course, I could be quite mistaken about that. I'm sure there must be exceptions. But it is enough to dissuade me from participating. But the clincher is the fact that the Gospel reading for the Service every year includes these words of Jesus-

16 'whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matt 6:16-18

What matters is what is in the heart and mind of the worshiper, not what is on the forehead. The latter can never be a substitute for the former.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 22:35

Monday, February 23, 2009

REACHING THE EMERGENT GENERATION FOR CHRIST

According to several recent surveys by Barna Group and others, a large majority of Protestant youth drop out of church before age 23. Some return after 30, but most do not. They join an ever increasing percentage of Americans who have no church background at all. These kinds of statistics fuel the Emerging Church Movement. EC Leaders and their books insist that America's churches must seek new ways to reach these young adults. If we don't, they will not only not be saved, but churches as we know them are doomed to dry up and die. We all know churches which are doing exactly that. The Emergent Movement is (or was) basically an evangelistic movement as in the name "Youth for Christ". Understand this is where we must begin our study of the Emergent Movement (the actual name is changing or varied and some are now dropping the Emergent label altogether, but the phenomena labeled by it continues to grow world-wide). Read more on my website [here](#)

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:29

Saturday, February 21, 2009

THE WORD OF THE LORD

Jeremiah 6:16 This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.' 17 I appointed watchmen over you and said, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But you said, 'We will not listen.' 18 Therefore hear, O nations; observe, O witnesses, what will happen to them. 19 Hear, O earth: I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law.

Posted by Cal at 13:09

EYE THE ICONS

PLEASE NOTICE THE 3 ICONS AT THE TOP OF THE ESSAYS PUBLISHED ON MY WEBSITE.
<http://www.reformedliving.org> YOU MAY VIEW THE ARTICLES IN FULL PAGE SIZE BY CLICKING ON THE PDF ICON. YOU MAY ALSO PRINT OR MAIL ARTICLES! Thanks! ENJOY

Posted by Cal at 08:46

Friday, February 20, 2009

AN IMPORTANT NEW ESSAY Re EMERGENT CHURCH

I have just posted a new extensive Essay on my website (Reformedliving.org- click on the link in the column at the right). It is entitled, Reaching the Emergent Generation.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:40

WRITING TO HELP WITH WHAT IS WRONG

I have not been posting to this Blog lately for three reasons:1. Busy writing sermons for supply preaching2. Busy with writing an extensive Essay for my website3. Disengagement with current news events. Almost everything I read about in the news, especially coming out of Washington, is just far too distressing and upsetting to me. Engaging it with this Blog is futile. I feel like I am watching the Titanic of our Nation sinking and I am helpless to do anything. I pray that God will have mercy and intervene. With Him there is Hope. I am turning my energies to study and write of things other than the obama-nation before me. I hope and pray these other things I write will help with what is wrong in the long run.

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 19:25

Saturday, February 7, 2009

LIGHT AND LIFE FROM THE LAW

Strangely, I find little interest among Evangelicals generally in the Law of God. On this subject, they usually repeat this dictum as their reason: "No one is saved by the works of the Law" and this one: "we are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone". I agree with these dicta. I am not saying anyone is saved by obeying the Law. On the other hand, when the topics of capital punishment, abortion, homosexuality and "gay marriage" come up (among others) I find that Evangelicals are quick to use verses they find in the Law to condemn these things. How do we explain this inconsistency and apparent contradiction? We are confusing the uses of the Law. The Law contains symbolic acts, rituals, especially animal sacrifices, which pre-figure and illustrate the future work of Christ. These parts of the Law are no longer in effect (they have been "fulfilled"). Then there are those verses that spell out moral and ethical behavior ("You shall not steal"). Such laws are considered restraints upon sin in society in general. These laws are usually used (very selectively) to bring conviction of sin and thus to lead unsaved sinners to Christ for forgiveness. But these verses have never been annulled. They still stand as God's Norms for how His Covenant People are to conduct their lives, privately and publicly. They teach Christians what it means to be righteous and holy before the Lord. (It just won't do to say, "I just follow Jesus" or "All we need is love"). This latter use of the Law is the one being neglected or denied by Evangelicals. That is wrongheaded and that is the problem I write to redress (See the Essays on my website). Never have Christians needed to know and obey the Law of God more than now. The attitude we should have is this one, as expressed in Psalm 19-The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul;* the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent. The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart;* the commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean and endures for ever;* the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,* sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.

Posted by Cal at 10:26

Wednesday, February 4, 2009

FILLING OUR POTHOLES

Our local DPW has a hard time keeping our streets clear after snow and ice storms. They always do the main roads first and leave the side roads till later- much later, if ever. Seem like most of us have the main roads of our lives clear and passable most of the time. Our troubles come on the side streets we take and the pot holes that we do not deal with till later- if ever.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 14:07

WELCOMING VISITORS

We couldn't make it to our normal Church Services recently because of the road conditions so we attended a Service near our house. Roads and sidewalk were still a mess and slippery. So were the sidewalk and steps going into the church building. Once in we saw two ushers in the foyer, chatting while they waited for folks to arrive. They welcomed us, but I was disgusted. Didn't they know how bad the walks and steps were? Apparently not their job. They didn't care and kept chatting. They had made it in, apparently through a side door only regulars would know about. I found a shovel and cleared the walks and steps- not my job either. We were visitors. But it had to be done before someone fell and got hurt. Not a warm welcome, for sure. We know this particular church is dying, I wonder if indifference to the needs of visitors could be part of the reason?

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:06

PRAYING FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

Across the street from the aforementioned church is a Middle School. Around 2:30 every weekday hundreds of young teens gush from the bowels of the building and pour out on the sidewalks and into the street. Like a river, they flow around the church which stands empty most of the time. Rapidly and noisely, they disappear into the neighboring-hoods. Almost all of students are Hispanic or African American. I pray for them and I pray especially for their Teachers. What important and "challenging" work they have cut out for them. I am very thankful for Christians who answer the call to minister in Public Schools, all public schools, but particularly inner city ones. (To be honest I wouldn't want to do it. But I was an inner city social worker and an inner city Pastor and we have lived for years in an "inner city") Most of the students in our City drop out before twelfth grade. The majority live below the poverty level. Many are from single parent homes. In spite of that, our Superintendent is quoted in today's paper that "Demographics do not determine destiny." He himself is a Black man with a PhD who has a tough "No excuses" policy. He says self esteem is important and the way to find it is through academic achievement! And he repeats the truism, the key to that achievement is parental involvement. I pray for him too. Good man!

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 14:04

Tuesday, February 3, 2009

NEW ARTICLE ON MY WEBSITE: THE SABBATH

We previously posted an article about the Tithe and sought to answer the question: Is tithing for Christians? I have now posted an article about the Sabbath on my website, Reformedliving.org. What is the Sabbath? What does observing it involve? Does God expect Christians to observe the Sabbath? Why?

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 15:28

NEW ARTICLE ON MY WEBSITE: JUBILEE ECONOMICS

Some Christians today believe in what they call "Jubilee Economics". They are convinced that the Bible teaches an economy of enough, of economic equality and that the Bible rejects private enterprise, the free market and the profit motive. The latter are supposed to be unchristian. Where do these Christians find Jubilee Economics? One of the primary passages they use is Leviticus 25. I have posted a new Essay on this subject on my website, Reformedliving.org

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 15:20

I SALUTE YOU!

We constantly hear in the media stories that are supposed to make us sorry for people who are having a terrible go of it in these "tough economic times". To be frank, I do not really feel bad for most of them. Some, sure; they are genuine victims; but I have no particular sympathy for people who over extended and spent or bought irresponsibly. I do feel sorry for the multitudes who have always played the Game by the Rules and who will have to pay for the sins and foolishness of others. I especially feel sorry for our children and grandchildren who will be adversely effected by the egregious behavior of others (including our Government) for years to come. I salute all those who work hard, save, manage their money well, stay out of unnecessary debt, live frugal and simple lives, are honest and trustworthy (the way Christians are supposed to do). God bless and keep you. Actually, I know He will. Stay the course, don't cave in to fear or despair. Stick to your guns and Biblical principles.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 13:55

"SEPARATE BUT EQUAL" RACIAL RECONCILIATION?

I am confused. An IVCF staffer wrote recently about a renewed effort to promote Racial Reconciliation among staff and campus chapters. I agree that breaking down barriers between ethnic and so-called racial groups is important and that Christians should seek to be one in Christ. And yet at the same time, IVCF is renewing efforts to have Black only Ministry on campus, separate but equal.

She wrote, " why does IVCF start "ethnic-specific" groups? (e.g. Why should we have a black fellowship on campus, and an Asian-American group, instead of just one big multi-ethnic group?) The answer that our new Black Campus Ministry Director, Virginia Ward, gives for starting BCM chapters is, "to reach the black lost on your campus." The cultural barriers are huge for an ethnic minority non-believer to come into a predominantly white Christian group and try to connect with God. If he or she could be invited to a group of people who look and sound familiar, it is easier to hear the Good News and respond to it. During "Black History Month" would you join me in praying for ministries to black students in New England?" I am confused. Don't we often hear that Sunday mornings are the most segregated hours of the week (in churches)? And that observation is meant to criticize, even condemn, that phenomenon. Don't we hear about the importance of churches becoming multi-ethnic, multi-cultural? Intervarsity Press has published books on the subject. So I am confused to read, "cultural barriers are huge for an ethnic minority non-believer to come into a predominantly white Christian group and try to connect with God. If he or she could be invited to a group of people who look and sound

familiar, it is easier to hear the Good News and respond to it." Is this really true? Or are there other factors here that should be revealed and explored? (maybe reverse racism? I wonder where the real barriers are and who erected them. And what can bring those barriers down. I thought experience has taught us that separation does not do that. The reality is, We all need to learn to live in a multi-cultural world. What better place to learn than in college? Will someone who comes to Christ in an all black group eventually be open to assimilation and become part of a multi-cultural church after graduation? The reverse is also true. When and where will white Christian students learn to appreciate and love, worship and serve the Lord together with non-white students? How will black and white Christians model Racial Reconciliation in Christ on campus when IVCF maintains separate but equal chapters? I'm confused.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 13:47

Monday, February 2, 2009

NEW DAY DAWNING

OK. I must change my focus. There is almost nothing in the national news that does not disturb me. I have decided that writing about Mr Obama, the Democrats and the Congress is counterproductive and useless. They are not listening to me or to millions of others who did not vote for them (to hear them talk, we are not among to "The American People" who, they claim, mandated the "change" they are ramrodding through). Maybe the current mess in our Country may turn out to be a very good thing as multitudes of people must now reevaluate their values and way of living. Just maybe this will bring opportunity for God and His Word to break through into many hearts and minds that have been closed. Maybe as people suffer and pay a steep price for their greed, self-indulgence and irresponsibility they might repent and turn to the Lord. Maybe. I am also turned off by the RNC trying now to reinvent itself for "next time". I have got caught up in all of this and my Blood pressure shows it! I again conclude Evangelicals who support Mr Obama's agenda are wrong. And I conclude that Evangelicals who adopt the principles of secular Conservatism are also wrong (what are they anyway these days?) Atlas shrugging Libertarians are also very wrong- certainly, not Biblical. So I am re-focusing on my original purpose. See my post below. Thanks and Good Night. Better yet, thanks and Good Morning! It is a new day dawning

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 11:59

RE-FOCUSED

"One desire is the ruling passion of my life. One high motive has acted like a spur upon my mind and soul. God's holy ordinances must be established again in the home, in the school and in the public and civic lives of Believers for the good of the Nation; to carve as it were into the conscience of all Christians the ordinances of the Lord, to which the Bible and Creation bear witness, until the Church thus pays homage again to God in our Nation." I have amended the words of Abraham Kuyper to fit me. God has a Word for our times. Please read the articles I have written and posted on my website, Reformedliving.org. The link is on your right at the top of the column. You will find there some of my attempts to explain the Norms for living which God has revealed. Norms for marriage, family, work, economics and government. They are not Democratic, Republican, Liberal or Conservative. They are Biblical and what I will now focus on here.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 11:45