

Michael Brown: It Is So Easy for Us to Lean on the Arm of Flesh

Read Time: 4 Minutes 1 Second

It was a problem for Israel in the Old Testament and for believers in the New Testament. And it is a problem for followers of Jesus to this day. I'm speaking about our tendency to lean on the arm of the flesh, to look to people to do what only God can do. It remains a very serious and real danger.

The Lord said this through the prophet Jeremiah: "Thus says the LORD: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.'"

In stark contrast, He said, "'Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.'" (Jer. 17:5-8)

In the New Testament, Jesus said to His disciples, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life," (John 6:63). And Paul asked in Galatians 3:3, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

What does it look like when we lean on the flesh?

Let's say you're a pastor leading your congregation into a new building program. The Lord speaks to your heart, "Share the vision with your people, and trust Me to bring in the funds."

But when the money is not coming in fast enough, you put your church into massive debt by taking on a large loan and getting a second mortgage on your current building.

Or let's say that you're an actor called to Hollywood to make a positive impact on the film industry. The Lord reminds you, "Never compromise your standards and remember always to honor Me. I will open the doors."

But after refusing several roles because of the compromise involved, you take your agent's advice and do some raunchy sex scenes in the hope of getting bigger roles in the future.

These are just a few of many ways that we can lean on the flesh.

One of the biggest challenges we face today—and one that I focused on in "The Political Seduction of the Church"—is to put our trust in the political system to do what only the gospel can do.

As one of my colleagues wrote to me from Europe, "I would love it if we had a government, or governments, that were Christian. Like Paul said in 1 Timothy 2, so WE can live a peaceful and quiet life. Nevertheless, I never thought that it is the government that can release the captives, save the lost, heal the sick, raise the dead. NEVER. It can only be a vehicle of peace for us to operate."

Exactly.

Politics is important, and it is important the church stay involved politically—very important.

We should be informed and we should vote. We should hold our elected officials accountable. Some should even run for office

or work in lobbying organizations. Our presence is important and vital for the good of the nation.

But the political realm can only go far.

It cannot change hearts or transform lives. It cannot bring lasting reformation. It cannot replace or replicate or compete with the gospel.

Politics operates on a natural, fleshly level. The gospel operates on a spiritual level, even while it works through each of us.

But the role of one is not the role of the other, and the power of one is not the power of the other.

To confuse them is to guarantee failure, especially when we put so much emotion and passion and energy and effort into winning elections, even to the neglect of our personal devotions or our outreach to our communities. How can this be?

As T. L. Osborn (1923-2013) said many years ago when he spoke in Ukraine at a time the nation was under communism, "We Christians and Bible preachers are the best thing the Ukraine's got. They're trying to make bad people good. Politics can't do that. Parliamentarians can't make people good. God can make bad people good, but you've got to have powerful preachers, and that's what we are."

That's the great need in America today: for the church to be healthy, displaying the character and beauty of the Lord and for the gospel to be preached in power, making bad people good.

So, let's vote and be politically responsible. There's no reason for any of us to be sideline spectators when it comes to critical elections that could affect our children's children.

But let's keep our perspectives clear, and let's put our trust

where it belongs.

It is the gospel first and foremost, with all its claims on our lives. And is faith in God to do what only He can do.

And yes, let's get out the vote too. {eoa}

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