

How the Revolutionary War Weakened the Gospel—and 13 Lessons for Today

In recent years, we have witnessed the evangelical church's engagement in politics in unprecedented numbers. A few years ago, I read a poll that showed that most church attendees expect and desire their pastor to preach and guide them on important political and cultural issues.

At the beginning of our nation's history, Congress would often call in a preacher to exhort them as it related to a particular pressing political issue. They wanted to find out what the biblical position was before they voted. Biblically informed public policy decisions are vital because I don't believe we can or should separate our private faith from public policy.

Below are four progressive steps to how policies and laws emerge within any society:

The first is theology or religion. All laws are a reflection of a nation's religious culture.

The second is philosophy. The religious views of a nation eventually lead to asking the question, "How shall we now live?"

The third is political theory. Out of a corporate societal philosophy arises the framework for our laws and policies.

The fourth is the law. Public policies and laws eventually reflect a nation's morality, philosophy and ethos.

When the church abandoned culture in the late 19th century, it left a vacuum in the halls of power regarding religion as our Judeo/Christian foundation. This resulted in secular humanism

and legal positivism, which became the foundation for our nation's philosophy, political theory and laws. This gradually fomented a few generations later and played itself out in the 1960's cultural revolution.

I believe the foundation for any blessed nation is the common law. The common law is rooted in the nature and character of God as expressed in the Ten Commandments.

However, suppose the church allows political engagement, ideology and party politics to dominate its narrative, (instead of finding equilibrium through biblical principles). In that case, it will weaken the ability of the church to preach the gospel. It will also alienate masses of people who perceive it as a political "power grab" by Christians.

It should be noted that the LGBTQ community spent a few decades creating a positive narrative and gaining significant influence in the entertainment industry, universities, the psychological fields and other important areas. They implemented a bottom-up approach in their attempt to change the law regarding same-sex marriage.

Conversely, the church lost much of its influence in all these areas. The past generations focused primarily on politics. This top-down approach gave the impression to society that it was attempting to force Christian values on the nation.

This was bad branding for evangelicals and negatively impacted the Millennial and Gen Z generations.

Consequently, for the past 20 years, evangelicals have been lumped together with the conservative political movement. Additionally, they are not seen as being part of the cutting edge creative movement in music, art and entertainment. They are depicted as those who are not concerned about community empowerment and those who do not love their neighbors.

To make it worse, in recent days, I have heard from some

pastors that it has been harder to preach the gospel because the population has been confused by the massive Christian support for former President Trump. They found it hard to reconcile how a bombastic, narcissistic and megalomaniac president was heralded by some Christians as someone worth supporting.

Of course, every Christian should vote according to their conscience and biblical values. In a two-party system, it's difficult to find an ideal candidate. The problem I am raising here is not voting or endorsing a candidate, but overtly identifying one's faith with a candidate or political party.

Contemporary Similarities to 1776

In light of the Jan. 6 Capitol breach, many conservative Christians on the militant fringe were equating these days to the American Revolution of 1776. They believed the presidential election was stolen by systemic fraud, which to them is a greater infraction than that of King George of England's actions against the American colonies in the 18th century.

The American Revolution was a mixture of political and religious zeal that greatly weakened the cause of Christ until the Second Great Awakening in the 1820s and beyond.

As I stated in a previous article, "Is America Really A Christian Nation?"

The revolution weakened the spiritual life of the churches. It increased secularization, as America's political ideals and activism virtually replaced church attendance and Christian theology, as well as a person's commitment to Christ. During that time, the belief was that if one was not on the side of the American patriots, he was accursed of God. According to some, the American Revolution became the guiding light for organizing churches, interpreting the Bible and expressing the Christian faith.

Consequently, American patriotism and the revolution's cause became more important than preaching the gospel. It also replaced Christian missions. Thus, the present-day connection between Christianity and engagement in politics is nothing new. It is easily noticeable by those versed in history.

The revolutionaries held to a political theory rooted in the English "Whig heritage" of the 17th and 18th centuries that focused on natural rights (similar to today's Libertarians). They distrusted unchecked power, whether by the King, Parliament or the state church. Unchecked and unrestrained power was the root of all political corruption. Does this sound familiar to some political discourse today?

Hence, when the British parliament proposed a stamp tax in 1763 and tea tax in 1773, it was perceived as an immoral grasp for power. The colonists thought "taxation without representation" was a violation of their view of liberty and freedom.

This, along with other issues, led to the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, which the British viewed as an act of war.

Whig ideology also brought together those contending for individual rights, like Calvinist dissenters influenced by Puritan covenant theology and freedom-loving deists.

This is similar to the contemporary marriage of non-Christian conservative republicans and evangelicals.

Sloppy Biblical Exegesis

The bond between the Whigs and Christians greatly muddled the waters and hurt the gospel. For example, some preachers riled up patriots by likening Britain to the "Beast of Revelation" (see Rev. 13). In contrast, others quoted Scriptures that talked about God exalting America as a covenant nation (the New Israel), high above all the other nations (see Deut.

28:10-13).

Christian patriots used biblical imprecations against colonists who were still loyal to England. (Read Judg. 5:23 as an example of an imprecation.)

In recent months, I have witnessed some Christian conservatives attempting to pronounce biblical curses upon those they believe committed election fraud. One political leader in the church even inserted Trump's name in place of King David in Psalm 5 while pleading with the Lord in prayer.

During the American Revolution, many preachers erroneously used the freedom passages in John 8:36, Galatians and Romans (referring to freedom from individual sin), to justify breaking away from England. Others believed the emergence of America as the "new Israel" would usher in the Millennium. Some likened the Revolutionary War to Christ (America) versus the anti-Christ (England).

Consequently, commitment to the Revolution was connected to allegiance to Jesus!

American freedom, in some respects, bordered upon idolatry.

Thus, religion and morality were mixed in with the will of the people and individual happiness. There was a failure to prioritize the will of God and His kingdom as Jesus instructed in Matthew 6:33.

Furthermore, when Christians depend explicitly on the state to discharge the duties of God entrusted to the church and family, the result will be Christian institutions' death.

Unfortunately, all of the above led to the secularization of both the church and the nation as political ideas and activism supplanted theology, gospel preaching and church attendance. As a result, by 1800, church attendance and deep spirituality (what theologian and revivalist Jonathon Edwards espoused),

was at a low ebb. It took another Great Awakening through evangelist Charles Finney to revitalize the church and prioritize the gospel.

As we conclude this article, I believe we can learn at least 13 significant lessons as we compare the American Revolution to contemporary times.

13 Historical Lessons Learned

1. America is not and never will be the kingdom of God.
2. We should never wrap the gospel with the flag of our nation or a political party.
3. Political activism should never replace our zeal for preaching the gospel.
4. The proper financial support of the church should never be compromised by political fundraising.
5. We should never depend upon the state to be that which God consigned to the church as the light of the world.
6. America never replaced the church as the "New Israel" (Gal. 6:16, 1 Pet. 2:8-9).
7. We should never allow our church to function as an extension of our political party.
8. Those who voted for a candidate or party we did not support are not our enemies. (Christians have historically espoused divergent perspectives and voted differently from one another. The real enemy of our destiny is not flesh and blood but the dark powers that rule earthly kingdoms and mindsets (Eph.6:10-13).
9. Pastors should preach biblical principles that inform people rather than manipulate people to achieve a particular political result.
10. Christians should derive their identity from the kingdom of God, not their political party.
11. Disciple-making should focus more on theology than political ideology.
12. Political activism should be conducted through the lens of Scripture and for the love of neighbor.

13. The church should be primarily branded as Christ-followers, not followers of partisan politics.

May the Lord help us practice the habits of the heart as per the spiritual disciplines of fasting, prayer, Scripture reading and church participation. May these practices help us grow in discernment so that we can truly be the light of the world and salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13-16). {eo}

Purchase Joseph Mattera's latest book, The Jesus Principles, available now on Amazon [here](#). {eo}

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