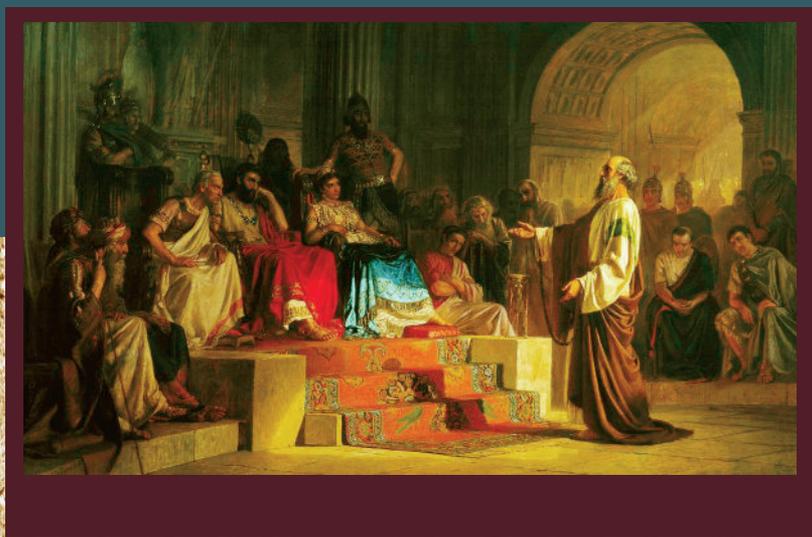


BEYOND POLITICS

A Heart for Leaders



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Cover art: Apostle Paul On Trial by Nikolai Bodarevsky, 1875.





1

CHAPTER ONE

A HEART FOR LEADERS

Here I am, O Lord! Send me!

I would like to say that's how it happened, but Isaiah's commencement was a bit more dramatic than my own. God spoke to him directly, and instantly he was a prophet. I, on the other hand, entered the political arena as one enters cold water... very slowly.

I was sitting in class in my final year of seminary, eager to graduate and to minister anywhere in the world. That was challenged when two classmates cornered me after class.

Have you considered reaching your political leaders with the gospel?

Mission work interested me, but what did I know about ministering to politicians? I didn't like C-SPAN and hadn't even met a lawmaker at the time. What did I know about the movers and shakers of Illinois? It didn't seem like much of a fit, but I agreed to find out more and pray.

The core issue wasn't my lack of experience; it was my lack of God's heart. I simply didn't care. Politicians were in their world wining

and dining, smiling and laughing, kissing babies and shaking hands, pandering to the people, etc. I wanted to minister to real people.

It was then that our gracious God helped me see that politicians are real people. Long hours and travel weigh on those who would like to be home with family. Marriages are often tried, and many crumble. Not all politicians have oodles of money or drive a Bentley. They're more like to own a Chevy and stay at cheap hotels to save money (no, they don't all summer in the Hamptons).

They're real people, no doubt about it. Perhaps the only difference between us and our leaders is the high profile. Have you ever misspoke and been corrected? I have, and it didn't end up on the nightly news. Yet, when our leaders misspeak, bet on thousands or even millions hearing and then mocking them for it.

It wasn't long after I started ministering that I learned about a unique temptation in politics—re-election. Many sincere men and women win an election wanting to do good, only to realize that doing good might mean losing their next election. They just can't do it, and so, they begin to make compromises. Issues once held with passion become peripheral, people become the means to an end, and little matters as much as winning.

It's a sad story, but lobbyists are tempted in similar ways. They're paid to be influential and well connected, right? There's nothing wrong with that until relationships are built only for the sake of personal gain. Like lawmakers, many lobbyists start out well, excited about representing something good. As the years roll by, the money can become so good that tunnel vision takes over, and life is reduced to dollars and cents.

All of us naturally love money and power, and in the political arena we see those sinful desires played out quite publically. Yes, we're disgusted by it (and rightly so), but we need to remember we're not above the sins that have shipwrecked the lives of others (1 Cor 10:12-13). There but for the grace of God, go I.

Lawmaker or lobbyist, politically active or not, we're sinners.

We're helplessly, hopelessly damned before the holiness of God, desperately in need of a Savior no less than anyone else. When you and I think of the political arena, how could that thought not enter into our mind?

It's easy to elevate ourselves as others fall, to laugh, and throw stones. That's our tendency, isn't it? Early in ministry I came across this statement by Francis Schaeffer...

There is nothing more ugly than a Christian orthodoxy without understanding or without compassion.¹

We're right, and we know it. So was Jonah who cared nothing about Nineveh, even wanting the city to burn. He hated the wicked and despised the mercy of God for saving his enemies. Yet, our hearts can become just as callous.

It's no secret that the political arena needs Christ. If that's true, how can we who have the words of eternal life scorn those without it and feel nothing when they die in their sins?

I'm reminded of Paul whose heart was filled with "unceasing anguish" for those who persecuted him (Romans 9:2-3). I believe the political arena is a mission field, and it's time to reach out to our leaders in love with a different message.

AN OVERLOOKED MISSION FIELD

As a child, I thought missionaries were the church's super-Christians. They were the people who sacrificed for Christ, who moved overseas to work with the poor, dressed funny, told stories, and always needed money!

I wasn't really sure what to make of missionaries back then, but I'm glad to say my understanding has matured. Some missionaries make tremendous sacrifices in this life, but sacrifice doesn't make one mission field more legitimate than another. Your neighborhood needs Jesus Christ as much as starving children in Africa!

Some missionaries have great faith, but so do some very wealthy

businessmen. Just because God places one in the jungles of Africa and the other behind a desk doesn't mean anything. Both are filled with opportunities to make much of Christ.

This means that making radical sacrifices isn't the measure of a real mission field. Where the message of our risen Lord is faithfully proclaimed, there's a missionary; and where there are unbelievers, there's a mission field. It's that simple. Though the political arena is filled with rallies, campaigns, issues, debates, and polls, it's also filled with unbelievers. That's what makes it a mission field.

Evangelicals have been an active force in politics for many years, but I think Michael Horton's assessment is correct:

When we see the staggering moral crisis of our society, the first thing we turn to is an earthly kind of wisdom when the Gospel, "the power of God unto salvation" is staring us in the face.²

So, just go evangelize and forget about politics?

Not at all. The point is that much of our political activism hasn't been mission-minded. It's right to condemn sin, but what about pointing the sinner to Christ? One naturally leads to the other, and yet, evangelicals aren't really known for doing both in the political arena.

The world generally knows that we stand for the sanctity of life and marriage. It should know that, but shouldn't it know something more fundamental about us? We're not just moral people with Christ added onto to our lives. Rather, our lives are hid with Christ in God (Col 3:2). This means that our identity as Christians is bound up in Him. What Christ loves, we love; what Christ hates, we hate. Our views and positions are no longer our own, but have everything to do with Him and His glory.

Certainly be involved in politics, but let's do it in a way that makes much of Jesus Christ. Openly, unashamedly, and unambiguously be identified with Him, appealing to His Word rather than the latest studies or statistics.

Oh, I can't use the Bible in politics. No one believes that Book. I've got to use something more acceptable.

But why? Truth is truth whether it's accepted or rejected. God's Word is truth (John 17:17), and He's honored when His Word is elevated.

Come back with me to the 1890's for a minute. It was a time when the currents of theological liberalism started gaining force in America. Many seminaries and denominations gave way. They continued to use the same old words such as "atonement" or "salvation", and they continued to study the Bible or gather together for church services, but it wasn't the same anymore. Salvation no longer meant being saved from the wrath of God. The Bible was no longer considered inerrant. Church services became less about the worship of God and more about elevating good causes.

American Christianity continued to change throughout the early 1900's. Some fought it, but few understood what was happening or how to respond biblically. Perhaps the only theologian who could grasp the problem was J. Gresham Machen who said, "If Christianity is anything, it is a way of getting rid of sin."³

Like Vince Lombardi saying, "Gentlemen, this is a football," Machen was calling Christians to remember the most fundamental truths about their faith. Sometimes we need to be reminded of the same.

We should do good works, even in the political arena, and Christians have done many good works throughout the world. However, doing good isn't the gospel. Christianity isn't about moral reforms, social action, or saving nations. Our faith rests upon an event—the Resurrection, and it's because of this event that we have something so good to tell the world.

What's needed in the political arena aren't more "good" people just like us who can help enlarge our moral coalitions. What's needed are Christians who understand Christ's calling to make disciples (Matt 28:18-20).

Where there are unbelievers there's a mission field; and where there's a mission field, the message of the cross must be proclaimed. Woe to us for doing otherwise (1 Cor 9:16). As I said before, there are

many good works we can do in this world. Do them, but woe to us as Christians when we only do good. We need to go beyond politics to tell the world of our hope in Jesus Christ. Our mission is a message. Let's make sure we keep the main thing, the main thing.

PAUL AND THE POLITICIANS

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. — Romans 9:2-3

Great sorrow? Unceasing anguish? The apostle Paul had such intense emotions when he thought about his own people, the Jews. Because he loved so deeply, he felt so intensely for them. He opens Romans 9 by sharing that he would trade his own salvation, suffer hell itself, if God would reach down to save Israel.

Let that sink in because I don't think Paul was exaggerating. Consider what he endured that others might know Jesus Christ. He received his first death threat soon after becoming a Christian and had to be smuggled out of Damascus (Acts 9:23-25). He was driven out of Pisidia, nearly murdered in Iconium, stoned in Lystra, and then turned around to minister in all three cities again! (Acts 13:50, 14:5, 14:19-22)

After a beating with rods, Paul was imprisoned in Philippi, left the city and was attacked by a mob in Thessalonica before he was smuggled into Berea (Acts 16:19-24, 17:4-10). He was flogged more than once, hated, shipwrecked, betrayed, ever on the run, often starving, and regularly exhausted (2 Cor 11:24-27). No one suffered like Paul for the sake of the Christian message. It seems he was more ashamed to be quiet than to speak up and receive a beating.

Paul loved the lost, but perhaps you've never thought about Paul's love for kings? Let's take a look at Acts 9:15 where the Lord spoke to Ananias regarding Saul the Pharisee...

“Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and the kings and the children of Israel.” — Acts 9:15

Ananias knew that Saul would stop at nothing to destroy the church, and then quite suddenly, he's told to receive Saul as a brother. Not only so, but the Lord revealed that Saul would spread the gospel beyond Judea to the ends of the empire. That's a pretty staggering revelation.

Read Acts 9:15 one more time. God would soon call Saul to carry His name before whom? "Before the Gentiles and the kings and the children of Israel." Packed between "Gentiles" and "the children of Israel" is this small people group—"kings." Political leaders were part of Paul's calling.

It wasn't by accident that the apostle visited political centers, stood before Roman leaders, or even made it to Rome. All of these flowed from his calling. Think of the number of capital cities Paul visited: Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, Corinth the capital of Achaia, Ephesus the capital of Asia, Antioch the capital of Syria, Caesarea the capital of Judaea, Paphos the capital of Cyprus, Syracuse the capital of Sicilia, and Rome was the capital city of the empire itself.

Shortly after becoming a Christian himself, Paul's first convert was a governor, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7). He ministered to Dionysus who served as a judge in Athens (Acts 17:34), and shared the gospel with Crispus, the Corinthian synagogue ruler (Acts 18:8).

We could add Paul's meetings with Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa to the list as well. It wasn't by accident but by design that the apostle stood before so many leaders. Sure, he was dragged by a mob and forced to testify at times, but he wasn't always forced. The apostle had a calling that included a ministry to kings, he was determined to fulfill it, and ultimately he did (2 Tim 4:6-7). Paul pursued his leaders with the gospel.

I APPEAL TO CAESAR!

Paul had been in prison for two years when the new procurator came to power, Porcius Festus. Though Festus knew Paul was innocent,

his constituents wanted Paul dead. What's a politician to do? Compromise (Acts 25:9). Refusing to wait, Paul appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome (Acts 25:11).

From November through March, no one sailed on the open waters of the Mediterranean. Shipping ceased due to the treacherous winds. Paul voyage began shortly before this time when it was possible to cross though somewhat uncertain. Halfway to Rome, a “tempestuous wind” struck—the northeaster with hurricane force winds. The sea had become impassable, the crew had nothing to eat onboard anymore, and hope of survival faded (Acts 27:14-20). It was during this that an angel spoke to Paul...

“Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.” — Acts 27:24

That's the news everyone wanted to hear! Paul was helpless to reach Rome, to minister or to meet with Caesar. Yet, the Lord reminded him that he would make it. Indeed, the entire crew would arrive safely, and by spring of the following year, they did.

Paul's appeal brought him before Nero (prior to Nero's persecution of the church). Though the emperor heard Paul's case, I doubt he was impressed, and it's clear he never became a Christian. However, Nero released Paul from prison in 62 AD.

Let's take a closer look at Paul's Roman imprisonment—it lasted two years. Towards the end of his time he wrote that short letter to the Philippians. Some of what he wrote gives us a glimpse into his ministry...

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. — Philippians 1:12-13

They were an elite group of soldiers. The imperial guard was comprised of men who had been hand-picked by Caesar. They were a force of perhaps 12,000 strong when Philippians was written, and

Paul had been chained to one of these men after another during his imprisonment.

The tone of Philippians is so joyous that it's hard to believe the setting. *Paul chained to a guard?* He had a captive audience, for with each new guard, he shared the good news of Jesus Christ. That's how the gospel spread among the imperial guard.

It was also around this time that the imperial guard became the king-makers of Rome. Their honorable ranks brought these men status and money. They held political influence as well, in part because they could easily assassinate Caesar. Historically, the imperial guard either protected the king or eliminated him.

While in prison, this powerful group became part of Paul's mission field. That Paul rejoiced to tell them about Christ speaks volumes about his love for the lost. Where many would have been depressed or angry at God, Paul rejoiced and saw an opportunity to make much of Christ. He was faithful, and we read of the fruit in Philippians' last chapter...

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. —
Philippians 4:21-22

Caesar's household?

That's likely referring to the imperial guards. So close to Caesar, they were considered part of his extended household. Thus, God's servant had an audience with some of the most powerful people in the entire empire. Apparently some of them received the gospel and became Paul's brothers in the faith.

Rome didn't have lobbyists in the sense we do today, but citizens could appeal to Caesar or to the Senate. Paul did, and yet, when he finally reached Rome his message was singular. He talked about the cross of Christ so much that all of Caesar's guards knew about it. He may have spoken with them about other issues. It's certainly possible, but regardless, the central issue was Christ. The apostle

wanted those in positions of authority to know the message of salvation, and by God's grace, some received it.

FROM PAUL TO TIMOTHY

It's quite a legacy that Paul left us as Christians. When he first came to Christ, Christianity was a small circle of disciples centered in Jerusalem. When he died, the Lord had used him to pull that circle into an oval encompassing everything from Jerusalem to Rome.

Our sovereign God had called Paul to take the gospel to political leaders. From his first convert, to the capital cities he visited, to his Roman imprisonment later in life, Paul had a burden for kings. At the end of his life, in 66 AD, he wrote to Timothy these words...

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, **for kings and all who are in high positions**, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. — 1 Timothy 2:1-4

Timothy was a young leader and friend who was ministering in Ephesus. At the start of Paul's instruction, he urges Timothy to pray for all people, specifically "for kings and all who are in high positions."

Pray for everyone, Timothy. Pray for your political leaders.

And why? Because prayer for others is good and pleasing "in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved." This helps us understand what Paul wanted Timothy to pray for. It wasn't a generic prayer on behalf of all mankind, but specifically aimed at the salvation of the lost. It's evangelistic praying, and tucked within is a word about praying for kings.

After all the beatings he endured at their hands, Paul's passion for the salvation of his leaders had not been extinguished. You would think thirty years of hard ministry might embitter a man, but not in Paul's case. His heart remained soft as he penned this epistle.

I urge you, Timothy...

It could be translated as “I beseech you, Timothy” or “I beg you, Timothy.” Words such as these reveal the intensity of Paul’s emotion for the lost. It seems the more the world hated him, the more he reached out with love and grace.

But why pray for your political leaders? One reason is so “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life.” Waves of persecution came and went for the first 300 years of church history. In fact, by the time 2 Timothy was written, Christians were experiencing the “fiery trial” that Peter saw on the horizon (1 Pet 4:12). Their own government pursued and persecuted them with a cruel vengeance.

Paul along many of our ancestors in the faith suffered greatly. They wanted to live peaceful and quiet lives free from persecution. How would that ever happen? According to Paul, by prayer. Apart from God reaching down to change hearts throughout the Roman Empire, Rome would never change.

We live in very different times than Paul and Timothy. We have the opportunity to stand for truth, and to engage our leaders in ways that those early Christians could not. Though we must speak up at times, may we never place our faith in the next election or changes in policy.

If you want to change a nation, start by praying that those who lead it might turn to Christ. By changing hearts, the Spirit of God changes minds and lives as well. And if the Father chooses to radically change millions of Americans in our generation, the results would surpass anything we might imagine.

William Wilberforce was an English Parliamentarian in the early 1800’s who fought for the abolition of the slave trade. Though the legislation needed to change, he didn’t believe the fight would be won at this level. Politics reflect a nation’s morals; its morals reflect its deeper spiritual condition. Thus, he spent a great deal of his life calling his countrymen back to “true religion” or what we might call biblical Christianity. Wilberforce writes...

If... a principle of true Religion should... gain ground, there is no estimating the effects on public morals, and the consequent influence on our political welfare.⁴

May “true religion” gain ground in America.

CHRISTIAN ROME

They endured many waves of persecution, but those early Christians often looked to the King of Kings for strength. They trusted in the God who could do whatever He pleased with their political leaders. They prayed for Caesar, even showed him honor while hurting (1 Pet 2:17).

Early in the third century Tertullian wrote these words...

Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish.⁵

Without a hint of bitterness, Tertullian sought to love the emperor. It's the same kind of heart seen in Paul and the kind of heart Paul wanted to see in Timothy. Sadly, this pattern hasn't characterized the church throughout history.

We might point to different eras, but the baton Paul passed to Timothy was dropped. Perhaps it was in the fourth century when Christianity became Christendom? Christian leaders such as Eusebius and Lactantius were elated at the dawn of Christian Rome. I can understand why, but let's take a closer look.

Rome's new emperor, Constantine, professed his allegiance to Christ, and centuries of persecution suddenly came to an end. On the downside, Constantine merged the church into the state and radically altered her identity. From a persecuted, impoverished church came a persecuting, imperial church. Everything changed overnight.

A pagan empire had meant the political arena was an obvious mission

field. A Christian empire meant the very opposite. It also meant the weapons of the world would be available to the church. No longer were heretics disciplined according to Matthew 18; church leaders could hand them over to the state for execution.

It wasn't until the Protestant Reformation that city-states, such as Geneva, began to separate church and state. What was accomplished then rippled outward to influence others, even the founders of America.

Today, however, separation of church and state has come to mean the separation of God and state. Increasingly we find ourselves living in an intolerant culture that rejects the cross of Christ. It isn't far off from the attitude of ancient Rome. Christians may not be persecuted at this time, but some of our leaders are no less antagonistic.

Should we become angry and demand better? I believe our response should look more like that of Tertullian. There is a place for speaking up and confronting sin, for lobbying against the ills of our society, but may we do it lovingly. And let's not stop by only telling the world of what's wrong. We need to go on to speak of the death and resurrection of our Lord.

Oh, that we would have Paul's heart seeing past Rome's tyranny to the fact that Rome's leaders needed the Savior!

When I walk the halls of our Capitol, I often remind myself that one day the people of God will spend eternity in a city whose architect and builder is God Himself (Heb 11:10). That excites me and helps me focus in ministry. I'm a sinner saved by grace with no right of my own to any good thing, but in Christ, I'll receive a future home that surpasses anything I've ever known.

I want to encourage you with that thought. Yes, our nation has shifted and continues on a godless course, but may the Lord soften your heart and fill it with compassion. Pray for the salvation of your leaders, even tell them about your hope in Christ. Apart from this, there is no hope for our nation, for our leaders, or for anyone else.

You won't hear a voice from heaven tonight, but you do have a commission to make disciples (Matt 28:18-20). There are many mission fields, and one of them is among your political leaders. I hope you will respond saying, "Here I am, O Lord! Send me!"

NOTES

- ¹ Francis Schaeffer, "The God Who is There," in *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 34.
- ² Michael Horton, *Beyond Culture Wars* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994).
- ³ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 77.
- ⁴ William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, ed. Kevin Charles Belmonte (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 211.
- ⁵ A. Cleveland Coxe, James Donaldson, and Alexander Roberts, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers. Volume 3: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian* (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 42.

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Civil Servant Ministries exists to engage the political arena in Illinois with the hope of the gospel.

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