

## Should God Bless South Africa? Part 2

By David de Bruyn

Every time our national anthem is played, the words 'God bless Africa' are sung. People can take such blessing for granted or misunderstand what is meant by the words, so we've been exploring the question, '*Should* God bless South Africa?'

In Part 1 of this series, we defined what blessing is. We then saw God's requirement for blessing a nation – righteousness. When a nation has righteous rulers, and righteous citizens, God's general and specific blessing may fall upon that country. That leads us to ask the critical question: How does this come about? What should we do to create this situation? How will we end up with righteous rulers and righteous citizens?

We have two extremes in this debate. We have the people who say: 'Nothing. God will sort it all out eventually. We're just passing through, so who cares – let's just live our lives unto God, and hope God will bless me and mine.' This kind of isolationist attitude is not Scriptural. To love your neighbour as yourself means to want for them what God has blessed you with. It is only love to seek the blessing of God upon your neighbour.

But on the other end of the spectrum, we have other unbiblical extremes. They are the moralising camp and the politicising camp. The moralising camp says, 'God will bless our country if we get rid of the pornography, abortion, crime, corruption, and injustice. So we need to restore morals to our country.' They believe moralising will produce righteousness. But the methods are all wrong.

The moralising camp thinks that these morals can be brought about through protests, through awareness campaigns, and ideally through legislation. They feel that if the law forbids sin, then God will bless the country. So their action is always along the lines of petitions to governments, debates, marches and protests.

Now, some of these may have their place. And certainly, if the laws forbid sin, the consequences of breaking the law will ideally mean less of it occurs. But here is the fundamental problem with such thinking – righteousness cannot be forced from the outside in. You cannot claim that a population of people whose hearts are unchanged, and who avoid some sins because of the legal consequences – are righteous.

Righteousness does not come by the law – by the Law of Moses, or by the current law of the land. As **Galatians 2:21** says, "*I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.*" Consider the Pharisees, who were outwardly as moral as you can get. They were as far away from the outward sins that moralisers condemn as you can imagine.

So when God came to earth as a man, did He not join with them in condemning the prostitution, the vile extortion of the tax collectors, and the corruption of Rome? Well,

surprise: He forgives prostitutes, asks a tax collector to be His disciple, and insists the Jews pay their taxes to Rome.

Then He turns around and condemns – who? The moralizers – the Pharisees! He called them “*whited sepulchres*” – they appear beautiful to others on the outside, but inwardly, are full of dead men’s bones. This is the heart of moralising. We seek to clean the outside of the platter, but the inward heart remains unchanged.

Jesus said: “*For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*” (**Matthew 5:20**). In other words, their righteousness was not the righteousness God blessed or regarded as His own. It was a false, outward righteousness not from the heart.

God was not impressed with a people who abstained from certain sins but were not born again. He does not smile approvingly upon a country that has no pornography but rejects His Son Jesus Christ. God wanted a heart change. To follow the Pharisees in their moralising was merely externalism – changing an outward act here and there.

So what brings about a heart change? Moralising? No – evangelising. Paul said it is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation. A true transformation comes from the inside out. When a person is born again, the Spirit of God dwells within them and begins to produce the fruit of righteousness. Christ’s righteousness is imputed toward them, it is counted in their favour, and they can now begin to work that out.

This is not just a theological issue to be debated by Bible college professors. This is really the heart of the issue. What makes a people, a nation, righteous? If it is adherence to certain laws, then yes, by all means, moralise. But Scripture tells us that all our righteousness is like filthy rags. Until a person stops rejecting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, the wrath, the anger of God, abides on them.

To tell an unsaved man to avoid, for example, pornography, is like putting a plaster on a cancerous melanoma. **2 Corinthians 5:21** tells us: “*For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*” This is how someone becomes righteous, through justification by faith.

As we look to Christ in faith as our only means of reconciliation with God, His righteousness is credited to us, while our sin penalty is paid by Him. Now we are in a position to begin fleshing out the righteousness that has been credited to us. Before this event, to ask a man to adhere to certain morals is both foolish and impossible.

God said to Israel through Jeremiah: “*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil*” (**Jeremiah 13:23**). The process of having a righteous population or righteous rulers, then, must begin with the Gospel. It makes no sense to try and enforce what only the Gospel can ultimately produce apart from it. That puts the cart before the horse.

God is as impressed with a country that is moralising as He was with the Pharisees. In fact, He condemned moralism a lot more than He did the sin of the sinners, because it deceived people. Sinners know they have a problem, and seek salvation. Moralisers feel self-satisfied that they are good people, and deceive others into thinking the same.

Moralism reverses the order. It makes morals the power for salvation, instead of the other way around – which is the Biblical order. We should also note that those who are forever moralising are very selective about which issues to tackle. Moralisers always tackle pornography, abortion and the like. That's fine. I think those issues need to be dealt with.

But why, if we are to be consistent, is nothing said about materialism, greed, self-indulgence, disobedience to parents, divorce, tax-dodgers, and the like? Moralism becomes very selective about which morals it wants to promote. This in itself gives the unsaved the idea that if they avoid a certain blacklist of high-priority sins, they are okay with God. It creates a self-satisfied atmosphere among the unsaved that makes them unreceptive to the Gospel.

Another problem with moralism is that it gets so heated about the issues it promotes, that it tends to make enemies out of the very people Christians should seek to win to the Lord. People who disobey God's design for sexuality are not looked upon as a mission field that must be won to Christ, but as the enemy.

People who promote abortion or pornography are not actively evangelised, as we seek to show them both the righteousness of God and His grace. Instead, they are demonized, vilified, and in some cases, even insulted and attacked. This is unbiblical, and does nothing but harm the name of Christ and the body of Christ. Sinners are not the enemy. Moralising tends to make issues more important than people.

Furthermore, moralisers tend to make unbiblical alliances with unbelievers simply to promote their agenda. They will march with whoever denies the name of Christ, so long as they stand side to side on this particular issue. What that does is it shows they have elevated the issue they are promoting above even the Gospel itself.

Evidently, by marching or protesting with those who deny Jesus Christ, the implication is that it doesn't matter if you disagree with me on the way of salvation, so long as we agree on the evil of prostitution, or pornography, or the like.

Ultimately, the goal of moralism – which is to bring righteousness through legislation – is impossible. The kind of righteousness that God blesses comes through salvation. People are saved by evangelism, not moralism. Moralism is cosmetic; salvation is deep-cleansing.

The other camp, related to the moralisers, is a little more militant. For lack of a better word, we can call this group the dominators. Their view is that to create the

righteousness that God will bless, we must rise up and take over. Christianity must dominate through political, and even military, means.

Misguided individuals have done untold harm to the body of Christ with this thinking. Indeed, much blood has been shed as people held the unbiblical notion that we can force righteousness in from the top. The thinking is logical, but misguided: 'If we hold the reins of power, we can steer the nation toward righteousness, and this will solve the problem.'

If moralising is trying to force righteousness in from the outside in, dominating is trying to force righteousness from the top down. But Jesus was fairly explicit about what He thought of this thinking.

**John 18:36** tells us, *"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."* Here Jesus says that what He came to produce in the world would not be done through force of arms or the strong-arm efforts that characterise the political intrigue of man. Notice His words to His disciples:

*But Jesus called them unto him, and said, 'Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.'*

**Matthew 20:25-26**

The order in God's kingdom is not to fight your way to the top so that you can have influence, and then use that influence for God. That's a faulty idea of what it means to be salt and light. When Jesus used those illustrations, he meant that Christians, by their righteousness, would be so different as to call attention to the Gospel.

Jesus meant that whatever sphere of life a Christian finds themselves in, their righteousness that comes from the inside out should convict the world. Salt and light speak of a gospel witness, not of a power takeover.

Indeed, **Proverbs 24:21-22** actually warns us about people trying to overthrow political powers through their own means: *"My son, fear the LORD and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise, for disaster from them will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin that will come from them both?"*

Now does that mean that Christians are never to be involved in any political process? I don't think you can make a blanket statement like that. Nehemiah and Daniel were both believers who served in pagan governments. Nor do I think it is wrong if a political party has a particularly Christian agenda or stands for Christian issues. I think that can be very good if done in the right way.

I do not see a Biblical principle forbidding or forcing Christians to vote. But where we must draw the line is in thinking that the political process is what will cause righteousness to flourish in the land. It will not. Furthermore, it is God who sets up government. Certainly, our vote plays a part, but it is God's decision. Nebuchadnezzar understood this when he said:

*And He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.*

**Daniel 2:21**

*This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.*

**Daniel 4:17**

In addition, the reason God established human government is to establish justice and preserve order – not to enforce righteousness from the top down.

*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.*

**Romans 13:1-5**

God is sovereign over who rules a nation. He puts them there to rule wisely, as we saw when we looked at verses regarding a righteous king. And certainly having believing rulers will bring God's blessing on a nation. But what all this adds up to is that our goal ought not to be to bring about righteousness through the political process, but to evangelise so that there are more and more Christians who may end up as rulers.

We should aim to spread the Gospel so that political rulers have many constituents who believe the Bible, that they must take that into account to rule effectively. It is to have the Gospel spread so far and wide, so that more believers are chosen as rulers. Again, not so that they will legislate morality, but that through their righteous administration, God will bless the nation for their sake.

Christians should seek to evangelise so that the normal course of the political process will naturally involve more believers finding their way into authority. Since God sets up and takes down rulers, the wisest thing is not to try and move the hand of God, but to obey His command to evangelise.

A pastor once said to me that people generally get the kind of rulers they deserve. I think there is a lot of truth to that statement. Simply consider the logic. In a democracy, where people select their rulers, if more and more of the population is changed from the inside out, and they love God's righteousness, it is only natural that they will select leaders who promote the same things. Our goal is, again, to evangelise, not moralise or seek to dominate.

Paul's attitude toward the authorities is reflected in **1 Timothy 2:1-2**: *"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."*

Paul did not pray that soon a Christian king would take over. He prayed that the present authorities would rule correctly, such that Christians would be able to live out their calling in peace. Why should we bother praying for those in authority? Because of **Proverbs 21:1**: *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will."*

God is sovereignly able to cause a ruler to do exactly according to His plan. Our prayer is that God will turn a ruler's heart firstly to Himself, so that he or she may be saved, and secondly that they would make decisions and laws that honour God's Word. We ought to pray for those in authority, not reviling them and forever rebuking them.

Evil needs to be challenged, yes. Yes, bad legislation and foolish decisions ought to be spoken against in a good democracy. But the New Testament pattern knows nothing of belligerent, contentious Christians marching on Rome to give the emperor a piece of their mind.

What people from this camp do not see is that they often bring hatred of Christians for the wrong reasons. They are happy to quote Jesus' words about the world hating you, but they do not see He did not mean for us to be hated because we are stepping on people's toes as we seek to take over the world. He meant people would hate the exclusive message of the Gospel, that salvation is alone through Christ.

When the world hates Christians because of a select group that is being cantankerous, mean-spirited and militant for the wrong things, it brings an unnecessary disdain for Christians. And I think it ends up defeating the very ends they wish to bring about. In contrast to this spirit, hear Peter's words:

*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.*

## **1 Peter 2:13-17**

What will put to silence the ignorance of foolish men? Our protesting spirit? No – our submission and honourable behaviour. Therefore, the urgency is not to try and paint righteousness from the outside in, by moralising. Nor is it to try and force righteousness from the top down, by seeking to dominate. It is to take the gospel far and wide, so that more and more people believe and are made righteous, and thus we have more righteous rulers, and more righteous subjects.

God blesses righteousness. But righteousness comes by grace through faith, not through works, nor through the power of man. It comes when man humbly submits to the Gospel. Romans 10 takes this thought further for us:

*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?*

## **Romans 10:13-14**

The Gospel must be preached. Moreover, God's people must return to seeking Him with their whole heart. This is where **2 Chronicles 7:14** comes in. When Christians repent of sin, seek holiness, and humble themselves under God, seeking His face wholeheartedly in prayer and the Word – the result will be sanctification.

As this righteousness blossoms in individual lives, it will blossom in local churches. As it grows in local churches, it glorifies God as the right testimony of His name. God is happy to bless such a situation. God honours what is consistent with His nature.

Conversely, if people who name the name of Jesus Christ live lives that are morally repugnant, that blaspheme Him through their disobedience, they are storing up more anger against the nation they are dwelling in than if they were not there at all. God is jealous for His name above all things. Peter says:

*For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*

## **1 Peter 4:17-18**

Judgment begins with God's people. In many ways, if a nation is cursed, look to two things: either the absence of God's people altogether, or the compromise of God's people in refusing to evangelise and spread the Gospel that changes lives.

But just like judgment begins at the house of God, so does blessing. God can richly bless our country, and relent of judgment, as His people return to a passionate, single-minded pursuit of Him. As we put off the old, and put on the new, as we proclaim the Gospel without diluting it or watering it down, as we do so consistently – God's blessing can come.

'God bless South Africa' is not a chant that God must obey. He is the Sovereign. It is a prayer. It is tantamount to asking, 'God, save more people, and use us to spread the Gospel so that you can bless further.' Let us be realistic. God can bless South Africa, according to His sovereign will. *Should* He bless South Africa depends on the hearts of the people.

God will not bless what He speaks out against in His Word – unrighteousness. Righteousness does not come through the law; it comes through believing the Gospel. Perhaps the alteration of one word might bring it home to us: 'Go ye into all South Africa and preach the gospel to every creature.' May God bless the Republic of South Africa.