

The Real State of the Union Conference  
*The American Presidency and the King of Kings*  
“What About Christian Patriotism?”

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Psalm 16:5–6; Romans 9:1–5

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We will start by looking at Psalm 16. What about our nation in this election year, and before this year and after this year? Ligon Duncan said, “We are not going to impact the nations until the God-centered worship becomes a priority.” Here is the reason why. God-centered worship introduces you to a transcendent God and you will never do a big job or consistent job for God, such as bringing the Gospel and the testimony of truth with love to a nation, until you know how big your God is. That is what worship does, it keeps recalibrating us when we see the transcendence of our majestic God, Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day, and that takes hold of us. That sets the thermostat for life for that God as you serve Him in this world.

What I’d like to do to get to the question I’ll be addressing is to read two passages of Scripture. Let’s start with Psalm 16:5 which says [5] *The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.* Here He is saying the Lord of glory is the One that he has chosen to declare as the Lord of his life. The theology behind this is that the Psalmist has chosen God because God has chosen him but that choice of God did not turn him into a robot. That choice of God invigorated him so that rationally, emotionally and volitionally he has now made that God whose electing grace had come upon him the portion of his life, and this God holds his cup. In Hebrew cosmology that metaphor is pointing to the cup would mean life in that setting. It is that You are holding me life. God holds not only my cup but my lot and that is what is going to happen in my life; I am resting in the sovereign Providence of God. Then that gives him a desire to give a statement of praise in the next verse.

Psalm 16:6 says [6] *The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.* That is this life I have that You have given to me where I have declared that You are now my life, the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Now I’d like to look at Romans 9 where I will read this now and refer to this later. Paul is a man who was a Pharisee of Pharisees, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and is now an Apostle called of Christ to the Gentiles to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles and to Kings in various places in capital cities. This is what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 9.

Romans 9:1–5 says [1] *I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—[2] that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. [3] 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. [4] They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. [5] To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

I want to start with Psalm 16 and then you back to what we are looking at in this study, very briefly but pointedly on this matter of Christian Patriotism. So why am I dealing with this matter of Christian Patriotism? If you are a patriot and a Christian and you don’t know why that question is asked then either you are more equipped than most Christians or you haven’t really thought through it. Patriot is basically a declaration that I have a deep love, an abiding favor and a commitment to the place of my existence, where I live.

In the Psalm I just read the Psalmist has declared something very interesting. He says, *The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.* So what is he talking about? He is referring to what he previously said about his lot and where God had placed him in life. By no means do I think my dad and mom were perfect, but I have thanked the Lord so many times, almost daily, for the grandparents and parents I had. I didn't choose them and they didn't choose me. In fact at one point in my life my mother probably would have said something like this; 'I now understand why some animals eat their young.' There is a good possibility they will grow up to be teenagers. I thank the Lord that my dad being in minor league baseball I went to eleven schools in twelve years for I was always the new guy. I wouldn't have chosen to do that but that was God's appointment for me and all the things that I had accomplished in my life.

I'm grateful that God providentially brought me to Cindy and sent blindness upon her long enough for us to get married and now she's stuck with me. I'm grateful for the children God gave to me. I'm astounded that God has allowed me to be a pastor and that He has allowed me to serve in three absolutely marvelous churches. I'm not just saying this because this is the one I'm in now but He has allowed me to serve at Briarwood as my ministry has turned from the front nine to the back nine where I can see the club house in the distance. I am very glad for all of that. I have the privilege on behalf of ministry to travel to many countries to extend the Briarwood ministry in various places. I'm always glad to be back home. I'm glad to be in Birmingham. There is something very special I feel every time as I go through that passport line and I hear the official say 'welcome back home' to my country.

The lines of life have fallen to me in a pleasant place. That very word 'line' in the Hebrew could have been translated 'the boundaries' of life; the places where You have placed me. So I do unabashedly have a patriot's love for my country but I'm a Christian and the reason for my statement for the topic concerning the importance of Christian Patriotism is that I don't care who or what you love, in faithfulness to God's Word, you always have to be committed to an examination that, that love of that valid object has not become an idol in your life. Your Christianity is not directing your love for your spouse, your children, but your Christianity is being replaced by that love or your Christianity is only seen as an instrument for your love. It is right that I love my wife but I can't love her above Christ. I can't love her in place of Christ. I can't love her before Christ. It is right that in the name of Christianity I love my wife but my Christianity isn't here just to give me an effective marriage. My Christianity is here that Christ would be my life.

In other words, in patriotism and in every other valid love that I believe God gives to us, there is always the necessity to examine what we are doing and how we are doing it so that, that love is defined, directed and devoted, not to the object, but to Christ and the object is being loved in and for Christ. I think that is absolutely crucial in every arena of life including a nation. As you work your way through Christian Patriotism I would start by asking you this; Are you a Christian? It will make no sense if you haven't made a commitment to Christ and even if you have made a commitment to Christ this may be something a little bit different for you to think your way through.

So first, have you said 'I know I'm a sinner, I can't save myself, I know that I am rightly under God's judgment but I heard along with that bad news some good news and that is there is a God of glory and grace who has made a way for me to be saved'? There was no way and God made a way. That way is His Son Jesus Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life and no man can come to the Father but through Him. When you come to Him you will go to the

Father and be with Him forever and ever in the new heavens and new earth. So are you a Christian?

The next question I would ask you is, are you a patriot? That is, do you have a love for this country? So are you a Christian? And are you a patriot? Some Christians have come to a verdict because of the supremacy of my love to Christ then I should not engage in being a patriot, because I don't want anyone to think I love my nation more than Christ. So the way out of it is to not be a patriot or not to embrace that love of your nation or to not love the nation because of the problems in the nation.

In the Romans passage I read the Apostle Paul said he loved his kinsmen according to the flesh, the ones that had rejected Christ, yet he still loved them. These were ones who had concert with Romans who sent him to the cross, yet he loved them and even identifies them as Israel, his nation that he was a part of. He is even willing to love them to the point that he was willing to be accursed for this nation to be loved by Christ through him and to come to the love of Christ even if it requires him being accursed.

I love my nation but I'm not sure I could say that – that I'm willing to be accursed for the sake of a sweeping Gospel movement in my nation. I have come to the point that I am willing to be marginalized, mocked and incarcerated to bring a Christ-centered love to my nation but I haven't been able to utter those words that Paul said – I am willing to be accursed. So should I be a patriot? Paul would say 'yes.' I would say 'yes' and as Christian there is a place for a Christian patriot American. I want to be careful here with my language. Is there a place for Christian patriotism? The answer is 'yes' but don't let it become 'I am a patriot who is a Christian.'

I confess to you that I did not pay as close attention in English grammar as I should have, particularly the tenth and eleventh grades. I did stay awake and attentive long enough to know that the key is not the noun or the verb but the key is adjective and the adverb. The adjective controls the noun. So let's more closely at 'I am not an American who is a Christian.' It should be, I am a Christian American. The adjective defines what kind of an American I am.

I am a Christian patriot. There are patriots who are not Christians. Many have done things in God's common grace that I absolutely admire. I'm so amazed at how they were impacted by God's common grace in what they did for our country, even some who would give their last full measure to protect God-given rights that this country declares are at the very core of its existence – the unalienable rights, those rights that God has made. So there is patriotism and there are patriots who are not Christians but can a Christian be a patriot? Can there be this thing called 'Christian Patriotism'?

There have been patriots who have given their last full measure for this country and there are Christians who have served the cause of Christ to their nation and they too are patriots. They have been patriots and some of them have given the last full measure as they were numbered among patriots who died in the name of Christ for their country and that which it stood for, ought to be and could be.

So what am I talking about in terms of Christian Patriotism? For me, Christian Patriotism is a Christ-directed, Christ-defined love for our country that is manifested with devotion to Christ and focused upon promoting the love of Christ from that country. This won't fit on a bumper sticker but seldom does theological clarity and accuracy do that. Christ-directed means asking, Jesus what is my calling to this nation? Christ-defined means asking, how do I love my country, Jesus, King of Kings? What do I do when they elect a president that I didn't vote for? Will I do what a political party tells me to do or will I do what King Jesus tells me to

do, for those in authority over me? Will I give respect in the name of Christ? That is Christian Patriotism. I don't like him or his policies. Then labor to change them. Pray that they are changed but Christ has already told me how to deal with those in authority over me. Give honor to those whom honor is due. I am to give respect to them for the sake of office but more than that I am to get on my knees and pray for them.

I am going to have a love for my country that is directed by Christ and defined by Christ. It is that kind of love that I would not expect from patriots that are not Christians and yet I admire what they would do in many cases but Christian patriotism will be very distinctive because it is directed, not by the country but by Christ to the Christian as they live in that country. Then He defines my love and ultimately my love for my country is to manifest my devotion to Christ. Also it is to labor to bring my nation to embrace a devotion to Christ and that's what I believe Christian patriotism accomplishes. It is bringing Christ to the country in word and deed and bringing the country to Christ.

There are traps to avoid here for Christian patriots. Trap number one is the supremacy of America over Christ. Jesus is not a tribal god for America's well-being. Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He isn't there to serve this nation. He is there in the glorious Gospel truth of triumph over sin that nations will serve Him. The kingdoms of this world will become and are becoming the Kingdom of our God and bowing to King Jesus. So we bring the claims of the cross and the claims of the Crown to America. We do not bow to this notion of the supremacy of America over Christ that He is not a tribal god for this nation but He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings to all the nations.

The second trap to avoid is that in my effort to declare the supremacy of Christ to all the nations, affirming that He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords to all the nations, I neglect and avoid the priority of bringing Him to my own nation. I declare this supremacy of Christ by being engaged in the affairs of my nation. What does it mean for me to bring the supremacy of Christ, His cross that saves sinners, His crown that calls for surrender to Him as Lord of Lords and King of Kings? I don't do it with the weapons of the flesh or by coercion. I do attempt to do it with truth and love with persuasion, empowered by the Spirit of God. Bishop J. C. Ryle said it accurately when he said 'love without truth is barbarity, truth without love is cruelty.' So whether it's the millennials, the singles, young married, older married, or wherever it is, through us comes the testimony of truth and love to a nation.

We bring this Gospel stream with two rivulets. One, is as Christian patriot I want to bring the Gospel to my kinsmen. I want to evangelize and disciple. I want to bring special grace that saves sinners from sin's guilt and sin's power. I want to do this to my nation as a priority. Prioritizing my nation as a priority does not diminish my commitment to all the nations but on the contrary, to prioritize the work of special grace to my nation gives a foundation, authentication and accelerates my commitment to all the nations. That is why the same principle is seen when you select elders and deacons who are going to manage God's household. How can they manage God's household and those within it, if they haven't managed their own household? How can I with integrity make a commitment for the Gospel to go to all the nations to save the lost if I am not committed to bringing the Gospel to my own nation?

I want to pray big and act small. I want to pray big for my nation and I want to do it by sharing the Gospel with the man I'm standing next to while we're pumping gas. I want to do it by loving my wife. I'm asking God to restore the sanity of marriage to my nation. I want to teach my children and my grandchildren how to love their spouses. In other words, I think the same thing principle is then implied when we are a Great Commission church that wants to take

the Gospel to all the nations. It is not a diminishment of that commitment for us to prioritize bringing the Gospel of special saving grace to our own nation but there is another rivulet of the river of life. So, one rivulet is special grace that we bring through evangelism and discipleship.

There is also the rivulet of the blessing of common grace, where we will go into the public square to speak on matters of public theology to influence public policy, again, through truth, love and persuasion. I am fully aware at this point that I have to declare again this must be accompanied with prayer. Two days ago I sat down with a young man who didn't know Christ and I started asking him questions. There are two ways people think you're smart – one is if you're not saying anything and two is when you ask questions. After asking him a number of questions I spoke as passionately and persuasively as I could to him and I believe that is what Paul did. There is a reason Agrippa said to Paul in Acts 26:28, [28] *And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"* Was Paul able to persuade Agrippa? No because Jesus would have to give him ears to hear and eyes to see. So we speak persuasively without no thought that we can actually convert someone but because it is God who converts we don't deny our responsibility to be persuasive and passionate.

The same thing you do with special grace, passion and persuasion, bathing it with prayer because only God can open eyes and ears, you also do with common grace when you speak to matters of public theology, the sanctity of marriage, life and sexuality. Ultimately the reason these things have collapsed into a death spiral is not because sexual promiscuity, sexual perversion and sexual anarchy makes more sense. People do not embrace sin, sinful policies for a nation because they make more sense. They do it because someone has spoken persuasively in our absence and because our heart suppresses the truth until it's changed.

So we enter into it with confidence in the authority and power of God's Word and the power of God to move, but we enter into life as an asset in the hands of God. God, here I am as an instrument and I want to bring the truth of special grace in love, bathed with prayer to my nation. I want to bring the testimonies of common grace that restrains sin and exalts what is right to the public square for public policy, doing that bathed with prayer. Those are the things that God has called me to do and that is what I desire to do. I not only want to be an asset for the love of Christ in the love of my nation with special grace and common grace but I want to be an ambassador for Christ to America. I am here on behalf of the King of Kings to a nation that I love.

To be here as an ambassador means to bring the testimony of King Jesus and the Gospel of the Kingdom to this nation so I need to be embedded and equipped in the colony of His Kingdom which is His church. I think one of the greatest things we can do in patriot love to this nation is to embrace the call of Christ to plant Kingdom outposts in the inner cities, the suburbs and the rural communities. One of the greatest blessings to this nation is to be Godly churches. I need to be embedded in one. I need to be committed to the enlargement and expansion of the church into every neighborhood, sphere and every part of society. I want to plant the salt shakers and the light givers – Gospel healthy churches. That is an act of patriotism.

Do you think those people who landed on these shores were patriots? What was the first thing they did? The first thing they did was built a church and then they put in a school. They would have churches and school before they would have a food supply. That is what they prioritized and that is how they brought Christian patriotism, because they wanted to have a nation that was a city set on a hill. So they put the city of God there which is the testimony of His people – Godly churches. You make sure you provide an instrument to families so that they can raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord so they put a school. That

school would not only educate the next leaders of the church but it would educate leaders for the community. That school would provide education for the community. They didn't invent that for they learned it from the Reformers because that is what they did.

Whether it was Calvin, Luther or Knox there was a church either planted or revitalized and there was a school that bore the testimony of Christ. Those were two great patriotic gifts to our nation. That same value began to permeate the nation. Now, it doesn't anymore. We still built and plant communities but the first thing we build is not a church. It's a clubhouse and then a stadium. You can know people by who their friends are and you can know people by what their enemies attack.

So I will take you back to 9/11. Let me first take you back to the American Revolution. When the British troops and mercenaries came onto this soil in the war for independence and they went to a town and took it, what is the first thing they went to? They went to a church and either turned it into an office headquarters or a stable for horses because they knew that would demoralize the people of the community which is what they were trying to do. They knew everything was coming out of that church and that is why King George called that war, 'that little Presbyterian war.' It was the teaching of that church that brought the claims of Christ to public policy, where unalienable rights come from and where limited government opposed to a tyrannical government. So they went right to it. In the war of 1812 they did it again.

So where did Al-Qaida go on 9/11? They went to the Twin Towers in New York City, headed to the White House and went to the Pentagon. Are they opposed to Christianity in America? I'm sure Al-Qaida is but they really did see those things as the center of America. It was Wall Street, the media, Washington and the Capital. That is what they saw as the center. In Christian patriotism I want to tell this nation that what is most important is that we put a Gospel believing church in city after city after city that is equipping people to love Christ and know how to love their country for Christ.

I want to wrap this up by giving you some basic statements. Here are my warnings to you. Why is that some people won't embrace Christian patriotism and why has it fallen in such sad estate among our young people? One reason is embarrassment. The way some people in the name of Christ do patriotism becomes embarrassing. Our anger is not attractive. I would strongly encourage you to monitor how much you expose yourself to people whose whole goal is to get you to watch them to get you mad, not to simply inform you. I remember when Bryan Chapell told me his son asked him, 'Dad, when did Christians become so angry?' I'm all for anger against sin but I want to ask God to give me patience and persistence in relationship to other people. Then the cultural elite is trying to make you embarrassed to embrace being a patriot for it's not in vogue to be a patriot much less a Christian patriot.

What are some other reasons we don't have Christian patriotism? It is because we have had a loss of good models. We don't have many good models now. We have had a loss of people that mentor people in Christian patriotism. We have had a loss of the history of the unique blessings of God's providence to this nation and we're almost embarrassed to say something about it. People ask me, 'Harry, do you believe America is exceptional?' My answer is 'no, I believe God is exceptional.' I believe God has given an exceptional blessing of His providence to this nation, praise His Name! I will speak of His kind providence to this nation and I will thank Him for it. I will not be embarrassed by it and I believe that is one of the reasons why we need to embrace it.

I believe another reason is that we keep trying to do Christian patriotism apart from the means of grace in the church and apart from prayer and the Word. Therefore we become puppets at the hand of very skillful and manipulative politicians.

I will end with this. Do I believe Paul was a Christian patriot for Israel? Yes, and he was the same man called to take the Gospel to all the nations. I don't believe he thought for one minute his heart for his own nation diminished his commitment to take the Gospel to all the nations. Do I believe there is a way that I can be a bad patriot in the name of Christianity? Yes, go read the book of Jonah. Jonah was more than happy for God to bless his nation but he didn't want God to bless the other nations. He told God, 'That is the reason I wasn't going to go there, God, because I knew You would bring that revival to Nineveh and I wanted you to nuke them.' We are not talking about a selfish absorption with our own nation but we're talking about reaching the nations and doing so by prioritizing a singular commitment for Christ to our own nation.

Do I believe that the Reformers did this? Absolutely. Do you think Calvin had a heart for all the nations? Do you know how many missionaries he sent out? In 1557 Calvin sent scores of missionaries to Rio de Janeiro and they wrote a confession of their faith while in jail. They signed it and the next day three out of four of them are killed. Do I think Calvin loved all the nations? Absolutely but there is a reason he sent 1300 church planters to France because that was his nation. When he sent them he told them, 'you make it two years before they kill you but reach them' and thus a French Huguenot church. That's how he loved his nation for Christ. I believe Knox wanted to reach the world but there was a reason he said 'give me Scotland or I die.' I believe Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer wanted to reach the world for Christ but as they stood in that ditch right outside of Oxford University and lit the fire, Latimer said to Ridley, 'Be of good cheer Mr. Ridley for today you and I shall light a candle for Christ in England that shall never be put out.'

I want the whole nations to hear Jesus but I want to start right here and then by God's grace perhaps we'll have people like John Witherspoon who so engaged in this nation in a Great Awakening and in public policy that men were produced where he would even impact Thomas Jefferson to end the Declaration of Independence this way; *And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.* I don't think Thomas Jefferson would have ever thought to end it this way but was so moved because of a Christian patriot, John Witherspoon. They kept their honor for Christ and both of them lost their fortunes. You and I are blessed by their Christian patriotism for the cross and crown of Christ. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. I thank You for my brothers and sisters and our privilege to serve You in this nation and from this nation to all the nations. May the message of the Gospel of grace go out and men and women be brought to Christ and being framed and formed for Christ, churches planted for Christ throughout every corner of this nation, faithful to Christ, and Christians who are able with truth and love to speak persuasively, having prayed consistently on matters of public policy in the public square for public theology because we love our neighbors. O God, help us love our neighbors in this country, in Jesus' Name, Amen.