

Vantage Point

One definition of the term “vantage point” is: a position or standpoint from which something is viewed or considered.

Some examples are:

“You can see the whole valley from this *vantage point*”. Or perhaps: “From our *vantage point* in the 21st century, it is difficult to imagine life without computers.” So, we come to understand that how we approach anything in life, the basis from which we view ideas or the angle we start from, determines how we define our values in life!

Regardless of the specifics of your Christian faith, your theology if you will, I think we can all agree that the world we see all around us is NOT the perfect world that God created! Thus, we can agreeably conclude we live in a “fallen world” that has been affected by the sin and rebellion of Man! We read this account in the book of Genesis.

Genesis 3:6 (NIV)

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

What is interesting is that these very principles are used in scripture to define the very nature of living in a “fallen world.” They are the very nature of sinful man and his ways of life! These principles in Genesis are literally the components of our fallen nature! In our context here, let’s say it this way, “These principles are our vantage point for life!”

1 John 2:15-16 (NIV)

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.

So, are we going too far to draw comparison to these two scriptures as they describe the elements of sin, rebellion and ultimate spiritual death?

good for food -----lust of the flesh
pleasing to the eyes -----lust of the eyes
desirable for gaining wisdom -----pride of life

It seems that the Apostle John is explaining to us all that approaching life from our “fallen nature vantage point” is not what God desires for The Redeemed! Rather, he goes on to explain that if we approach life from a “Godly vantage point” we will see accurately the things of life!

So, *vantage point* is simply how we view things we encounter in life. Let's be honest, transparent and real! What about these *vantage points*? White, black, male, female, American, Guatemalan, Kenyan, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, Church of Christ, Catholic, Protestant, Atheist, middle class, upper class, lower class, old, middle aged, young, liberal, conservative, moderate, Republican, Democrat, Independent, reserved, outgoing, intellectual, average, and on and on and on!

While I do accept the difficulty of distancing ourselves from any of these *vantage points*, I do believe it should be the goal of us all to strive toward. My faith teaches me that the ultimate *vantage point* I must live from is "a redeemed, regenerated child of God"! Originally created in God's image and likeness and then through the work of Christ recreated in His likeness through accepting His salvation! That is to be the vantage point of all who name the name of Christ! Paul says to us all:

Galatians 3:26-28 (NIV)

26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Obviously, there are both male and female! Yes, there were both Jews and Greeks! There still existed slave and free! The issue was and is that we are "one in Christ" or can we say that Pauls' intent was that we now have "one lens" through which to view life...the Christian lens!

When I am brought into God's kingdom through rebirth, my *vantage point* changes from everything else to the singular *vantage point* of Christian! Not American Christian, black Christian or Democrat Christian or Republican Christian...just Christian!!

With these thoughts said, let's delve into the challenge we as believers are encountering today and will encounter to a greater degree in the coming days! To begin these thoughts, let me share a couple of quotes:

"Christianity is a politic. Not an American conservative or liberal politic! Christianity is a whole new way to be human that requires a complete reordering of the way we organize our lives both personally and in community. Christianity is a politic!"

"Christianity, as a politic, pushes us to ask how we should organize our common life in order to become more faithful to the way of Jesus!"

Stanley Hauerwas

"The Church must be reminded that it's not the master or servant of the State but rather the conscience of the State. It must be the guide and the

critic of the State and never its tool. If the Church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without spiritual authority.”
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In my humble opinion, THAT is close to being fulfilled! In my lifetime I have observed the Church of Jesus Christ pivot from a gospel centered message to a conservative and liberal political message! Not only are we asking society to provide the answers to “man’s fallen nature” but we ignorantly believe our political influences can empower the needed change! Jesus was abundantly clear when He said:

John 18:36 (NLT)

36 “My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. My Kingdom is not of this world.”

In 2016 I watched as the unimaginable took place before our very eyes! My heart ached as Christians and ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ jockeyed for position around the political candidate of their choice. It wasn’t that people made choices and it wasn’t even who their choice was, it was the way they approached their choices...it was their vantage point! If you hear me implying or manipulating your thought toward one candidate or the other...YOU ARE MISSING THE ENTIRE POINT! The candidate IS NOT the point! He or she is not the Savior, that position is already taken, and He is not on the ballot! The point is HOW we come to our conclusions...knowing and accepting that we may come to a different conclusion as our brothers and sisters in Christ! Our vantage point has caused The Body of Christ to be placed at odds with each other while our compromised approach to these choices have compromised the message of a loving Savior to the world around us! When people observe our behavior and hear our message and then try to reconcile that with the faith we preach...is there a consistent message!

Christians should have a different approach to politics. We should understand that our job in society IS NOT to bend society to our will! Our job as Christians is to season, as salt, society’s understanding of what it means to have right desires in the first place! Jesus said:

Matthew 5:13 (TPT)

13 “Your lives are like salt among the people. But if you, like salt, become bland, how can your ‘saltiness’ be restored? Flavorless salt is good for nothing and will be thrown out and trampled on by others.

Rather than being “the salt of the world” or the light set on a hill,” are we simply baptizing American political parties with religious language and worshipping at the altar of conservatism and liberalism? As “foreigners and strangers” in the world we should be presenting an alternative way to organize our lives in culture so that it sees what the gift of redemption has to offer!

It's time we stop believing that we as Christians only have two choices on the political continuum, either right or left, and realize both are two sides of the same coin! We actually have a totally different transactional power... The Spirit and Kingdom of God!

The Church of Jesus Christ and our message expresses a different way of life! A way of life that flows from desires that come from a total transformation of the human character! Through slow and continual change, we become obedient to The Jesus Way! His standards. His desires for the world around us! We should be willing to see the character and standards of society change from the inside out, rather than baptizing a political system and expecting it to empower change in the world! A political system is a reflection of society, not society's change agent! Too much of what is called "Christian standards" is carried out by those who have experienced NO Christian formation at all! Thus, most Christians in America are more American than Christian.

I read where someone said:

"Most American Churches end up inoculating their members with just enough Jesus to make them immune to the real thing! Their members default to a political party with a totally hardened conscience. That's where we are. Nobody begins with, "Greater love has no one than the one who lays his life down for a friend," and then ends up with the American brand of radical individualism. Nobody begins with, "Consider the lilies of the field" and then end up with the oppressive selfish version of some forms of capitalism. Nobody could take seriously the "story of the Good Samaritan" and embrace a radical form of nationalism!"

The idea of "having political power" is destroying the Church today! It seems we can see a parallel of this principle in the scriptures!!! In Mathew 4 we read what is called the "Temptation in the Wilderness!"

Matthew 4:8-10 (NLT)

8 Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me." 10 "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say,

Humanity has an addiction to power and the ability to force change! It is unfortunate that we are willing to seek out power through the ways of the world rather than through the "power of God's Kingdom"! Instant gratification rather than the changing of men's hearts!

Loving God and others are what Jesus said this life was about! While every single person would rightly say, "The reason I desire political change is out of my love for people." While that may rightly be the desired end, the means to that end simply has no power to produce it! The spreading of God's kingdom and the changing of the hearts of men are what produces ultimate change! When we listen closely to our words and

responses, we can clearly see our own vantage point! In other words, while we may want the same result, what means do we use to achieve them? At times, the means to an end exposes whether we love people more than political power!

One produces division instead of unity! One causes us to categorize people by race, religion or nationality. One causes us to avoid reaching out because of our own security or doing so challenges our economy! One causes us to deny or refuse loving others as our self! One causes us to promote policy over The Kingdom of God! One causes us to be blind to, "For God so loved the world" but rather fully embrace extreme forms of nationalism, patriotism, and Americanism. In short, we simply stop being Christ-like!

While there is a greater application of this scripture, I do think Mark chapter 8 applies to this situation!

Mark 8:34-36 (NLT)

34 Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. 35 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. 36 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?"

Once we learn how to truly see the world, NOT through political lenses, we will know how to affectively engage in the political process! It takes great courage to claim Jesus Christ, His kingdom and His Way as our political standard...but we must learn how! The *Message of the Gospel* is weighing in the balance.