

2016: America Hangs in the Balance

As he walked onstage, the large crowd gathered at The Awakening 2015 conference stood in honor and applauded the son of world-renowned evangelist Billy Graham.

Addressing the audience at Faith Assembly in Orlando, Florida, Rev. Franklin Graham said he didn't have to tell anyone that America "is in trouble."

"You know that, and I think what happens is people after a while just kind of give up," the president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association said. "They think, 'Well, what can I do? It just seems like things keep getting worse and what can I do?'"

But instead of giving up hope and disengaging, Graham said now is the most important time to pray and to become politically active because "there is a battle to fight" against "Satan and his demons and let me tell you something: They have gotten their way ... into every level of our government, and we've got to speak up."

"If you don't like who your government is then you need to stand up and vote for Christians and get Christians to run for office, starting at the local level and filling government up with a generation of Christian men and women who aren't afraid to take a stand for God and His laws and His principles," Graham said.

"Now, some people would say, 'Franklin, You're a lot more harsh than your father. Your father wouldn't have done this.' When my father was born, the Ten Commandments were on the walls of every school in America. When my father was born, the teachers still led classes with the Lord's Prayer. ... We're going to lose everything if we don't get involved in this next

election, and we only have this next election, I think, for our voices to be heard.”

As the 2016 U.S. presidential election gears up, faith and political leaders are calling on ministers to speak up about the nation’s critical issues and encourage their congregations to get politically active. They are also calling on Christians, who historically have had an abysmal voter turnout record, to not only vote in this election, but to run for political office and make their voices heard in the public square.

These pleas come as candidates on both sides of the political aisle are tossing their hats into the ring along with making hefty promises of solutions to an array of national problems.

Presidential contenders vying for the Republican nomination include former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, Dr. Ben Carson, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, as well as Florida’s former Gov. Jeb Bush and Sen. Marco Rubio. On the opposite side of the ropes, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stands practically unrivaled for the Democratic nomination.

As front-runners emerge, one thing is clear: the election of 2016 is a pivotal one and the chosen candidate could have the power to help change the troubling trajectory of America.

“A president sets the tone and frames the issues,” Huckabee told *Charisma*. “A president who believes that America is the result of God’s providence and that it’s sustained by dependence on Him will create a very different atmosphere from one who has ‘a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof.’”

The presidential election isn’t the only imminent shift in political power. High-stakes Senate races are set to take place in Florida, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and other states.

In the coming elections, political analysts and news channel contributors will debate over which societal ill is most responsible for America's decline. Each will have an opinion on which candidate is best suited to solve the problems. But don't be fooled. In this election cycle, neither politics nor politicians can save America.

"At 62 years of age, I've lived long enough to learn that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans can turn this country around; no political party or politician is the answer," Graham told *Charisma*. "The only hope for this country is Almighty God and His Son Jesus Christ."

A Historic Election?

America's faith and culture leaders agree that what makes 2016 possibly the most important election in American history is not the severities of its socioeconomic problems, but rather the depth of spiritual decay into which the American people have fallen.

"I stand convicted and convinced that the 2016 presidential election will emerge as the most important election of our lifetime," says Rev. Dr. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Evangelical Association. "This election serves as a clarion call for every Christ follower to vote and advance the Lamb's agenda with the understanding that today's complacency is tomorrow's captivity. Let us vote, not as white, black or brown people, but as people of the cross."

Mathew Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel, agrees: "2016 is a very critical point in the survival of America, not just another election."

David Lane, founder of the American Renewal Project, says courage is needed now more than ever "for charity toward wickedness is the fashionable vice, and indifference to moral evil is the crowning virtue of this age."

The Politically Incorrect

It's a struggle to admit that America is in decline, isn't it? As Christian citizens, we want to affirm our elected officials and remain supportive of their chosen paths of leadership. But as Washington, D.C.'s officials consistently fail to resolve the public unrest, it is becoming harder to ignore that America daily advances closer to her tipping point.

"We have abandoned our constitutional republican form of government and we are entering into a soft despotism," warns Matt Barber, a popular cultural analyst and an attorney concentrating in constitutional law.

"We are in dire straits. In this election leading up to 2016, we have got to elect in this nation a statesman," Barber says. "Somebody who has a clear understanding of our history, of our founding principles, and who will implement in public policy and in position as the chief executive our constitutional republican form of government and get things back to how they were intended to be because they have worked quite well for us until now."

Now, citizens watch as the \$18 trillion national debt climbs. Small business owners suffocate under government bureaucracy and ever-increasing regulatory red tape. According to Gallup, each year 70,000 more American businesses close. Meanwhile, little is done to balance the federal budget or encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.

Every day a staggering 4,000 unborn Americans are denied the right to life, yet proponents of such genocide are heralded as pro-women, liberated and progressive. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 24 million children in America are growing up in fatherless households. Marriage, an institution that provides the stable bedrock for our society, could be demolished with one quick swipe of the U.S. Supreme Court's pen. Meanwhile, churches and Christians, afraid of being

deemed offensive, scurry to accommodate current cultural trends only to disregard Scripture and claim the Bible sanctions same-sex marriages in the process.

Although headquartered more than 10,000 miles away, militant Islamists threaten American national security on a consistent basis. Whether ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Hezbollah in Lebanon, or al-Qaida in Afghanistan, each has declared jihad, or holy war, against the U.S. Yet, as these terrorist groups kidnap, rape, torture and kill Christians and other religious minorities, the Obama administration refuses to properly acknowledge the Islamic religious motivations behind their ever-increasing terror.

International relations weaken between Israel and America. After Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's victory in the March 2015 elections, President Obama said he would "reassess" relations with America's long-time ally and the longest standing democracy in the Middle East. Tensions, and talk of potential sanctions, between America and Israel arose due to Netanyahu's public rejection of participating in the establishment of an unjust Palestinian state that is committed to driving the Jewish people into the sea.

Support for Israel among evangelical Christians, especially millennial evangelicals, has been wavering. According to a National Association of Evangelicals survey, 40 percent of U.S. evangelical leaders have changed their position on Israel and Palestine over the past several decades.

Amid the chaos, Americans must recognize that the root of our deepest political issue is a religious one. While terror in the name of Allah runs rampant abroad, here at home we have pulled God out of the equation.

Gagging God

For the first time in our nation's rich history we have collectively rejected the role of Judeo-Christian principles

in the public square. As a result, America's brightest freedom is fading fast. What began as a safe haven for Christianity and those fleeing religious persecution now lies on the opposite side of the spectrum. Every day a new contention places God on trial.

In September 2014, Houston Mayor Annise Parker, a lesbian, subpoenaed the sermons of five pastors who publicly opposed a local pro-gay decree created with the intent to censor traditional Christian teaching and silence the gospel. Thankfully, Parker's efforts failed.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF), arguably the largest Christian campus ministry in the nation, is being snuffed out of numerous universities. Because the student-led organization requires its campus leaders to affirm traditional Christian doctrine, InterVarsity chapters were "de-recognized" and stripped of official recognition by Dartmouth, Vanderbilt, Bowdoin College, SUNY Buffalo, Tufts University, Rutgers and all 23 campuses in the California State University system.

We are losing our religious freedoms fast and with them our reverence for the Creator, from whom all freedoms flow.

A Spiritual Referendum

The problem with American faith and politics and the way they are juxtaposed is simply that we no longer know what we believe as a nation. With no singular belief system, we have a hard time choosing leaders who will fight for our national beliefs and values. We are no longer united under the gospel. We have forgotten our foundation as a shining city on a hill, and thus, we are groping around in the dark.

At one point, the kingdom of Israel was in a state of darkness and total decline. Plagued by drought, famine and the deaths of entire dynasties, the nation answered collectively for their leadership's disobedience of God's commandments. Eventually, the prophet Elijah confronted King Ahab and his

wife Jezebel for their idolatry. On top of Mount Carmel with 850 prophets of the false gods Baal and Asherah, Elijah asked the nation, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kin. 18:21).

How frustrating is it to read about the kingdom of Israel's rulers who constantly rejected God? Not learning from their predecessors' mistakes, each new successor lead the nation further away from God in pursuit of power. And each leader's sins ultimately led to their downfall and consequently penalties on the nation.

The parallels between the leadership of ancient Israel and modern America are astounding. God has blessed our land, yet our national leaders and the citizens who elect them continue to deny His very existence.

Like Elijah, America's influential Christian spiritual and political leaders are calling for America to turn back to God. In January, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal organized "The Response," a massive all-day prayer rally for America's spiritual revival. In a heartfelt call to pray, Jindal said, "As many of us survey our country today we are worried about what we see. We see a weak economy. Many of us worry about whether our children will inherit the same opportunities. ... Too many think that if we just elect the right politician, pass the right law, pass the right policy, that it will fix all that ails America. But what we really need in these United States of America is a spiritual revival."

In November 2014, pastors gathered at Grace Community church in Houston, Texas, for "I Stand Sunday." Here, Dr. Ronnie Floyd, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, told the audience and the American church, "It is time for us to wake up from our slumber. Our greatest problem is not in the White House, nor is it in the statehouse, but it is in the church house of Jesus Christ. We must get our lives right with the

Lord.”

There is only one solution capable of transforming the hearts and minds of mankind, and His name isn't found in the voting stations. However, His truth is written on the heart of every American, even those who choose not to serve Him.

In the coming 2016 election, it is vital that we as citizens elect a presidential candidate willing to acknowledge the limited nature of humanity. Our next leader must be humble enough to admit he does not have all the answers, and bold enough to put their trust in the One who does.

Kneel Before We Stand

Many Americans are familiar with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s most famous writing, his letter from the Birmingham jail. But many Americans are unaware of the recipients of King's letter. Dr. King penned the letter to local religious leaders, who, in the face of vocal racial discrimination, chose to remain silent. Some local pastors and rabbis even urged Dr. King and his supporters to remain silent as well.

In his letter, a disappointed Dr. King expressed, “If the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club.”

Much like the church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation, the current American church is lukewarm when it comes to government and culture. And like those Dr. King addressed, the church is at risk of becoming an irrelevant social club. The American church has gone from being “the salt of the earth” to being flavorless; something Jesus admonished His disciples not to do in Matthew 5:13-16.

Over and over again I've heard Christians I know personally exclaim, “I'll stay out of the government's business if the

government stays out of my business.” Sadly, it’s too late. The government’s invasiveness has reached our doorstep. Now what?

Not every Christian must pack up and move to Washington, D.C., to help turn this country back toward God. But we do have to act. We have to pay attention to candidates’ actions, not just their words. We have to vote in matters of local, state and federal policy. We need to know what public education is teaching children in their history and civics classes. We need to talk about the consequences of sin and the difficult reality of hell in our churches and small groups. We must understand the urgent need to share biblical truths with our lost neighbors craving His hope. Most importantly, we have to pray.

“Before we take a stand, we must begin on our knees. Even as we march, we walk in a spirit of prayer crying out for God to move, to intervene,” said Metro Pastor Garrett Kell to the Institute on Religion and Democracy. “Because unless He shows up, nothing happens. At least not lasting change.”

Rejoice in knowing there are already Christians—young and old—actively working to spread the gospel throughout politics. But there is still much work to do, and it must begin now. And we are not alone in this task. The Holy Spirit is at our side.

In 2016, the victory of one political party over the other is not going to solve our problems. Our only answer as a country is to fall to our knees before the God whose face we sought at the birth of our nation and elect a president who reflects that humility.

“As a nation, a storm is coming, ... but the church has got a chance,” Graham says. “I don’t know how much we’ve got, but we have a little time so let’s speak up.

“Let’s not be afraid. I can tell you one thing. I’m not going to back off. I’m not going to run. The Bible says He’s coming

back. Jesus Christ is coming back for his church. He's coming back so let's be about His work. Let's be faithful to His Word. Let's be faithful to Him in everything we do and everything we say."

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Franklin Graham shows why "a storm is coming" due to religious persecution around the world at .