

What Compromise in the Church Could Mean for the 2020 Presidential Election

While there has never been a perfect time since mankind sinned way back in the Garden of Eden, it seems things are getting worse—almost as if our cultural decline is happening at warp speed now. It's manifesting itself on a global scale, but also through the cultural divide we see so plainly in our own nation.

It's as if secularism is the new religion of our nation, hindering the church and its mission at every turn. Yet as Michael S. Horton, theology professor at Westminster Seminary, says: "Secularization ... is not just something that happens to the church; it is something that happens in the church."

I agree—and I'm not the only one.

In his weekly "American Renewal Project" newsletter, conservative activist David Lane recently wrote, "'Western culture that at first drifted and is now rushing headlong into apostasy from the triune God is a direct result of the vacuum created as American Christendom relinquished the town square. The disengagement from the culture by Christians left a void in America that is now being filled by everything anti-Christ.'"

I've been sounding this alarm for years on *Charisma's* various platforms including my own "Strang Report" newsletter and podcast. And it's the reason I wrote a new book called *God, Trump and the 2020 Election*. The book is as much about God, His purposes and what is happening in America as it is about politics. That's because of what is at stake for Christians if this controversial president is not reelected 10 months from now. As I've written before, conservatives and especially

Christians will lose an advocate for the freedoms and principles we value.

“Decisions have consequences,” Lane says. “The gathering storm engendered by Baby Boomers and passed on to the Millennial and Gen Z generations to sort out will come down hard on the weak-kneed and lily-livered. What Christian minister and cultural theologian P. Andrew Sandlin styled ‘Sunday-go-to-meetin’ Christianity’ has been the prevailing attitude over the last century. Making no demands on the culture, this attitude exposed ‘the entire West to the risk of a grave cultural and political crisis, and perhaps to a collapse of civilization.’ ... The last two generations of Americans handed down this attitude to their children and their children’s children.”

Lane predicts that a battle over freedom of conscience is coming, and it will be “with the secular and media luminaries who dominate the spiritual, intellectual, educational, economic and vocational cultural mountains of influence in America. ‘Big Business’ has become allied with the secular left, turning into active combatants attempting to put the final nail in the coffin of America’s once biblically based culture. Public education already did so about 50 years ago, bringing America’s schooling down to the lowest common denominator.”

Over the last century, secularized intellectuals have succeeded in replacing Western civilization’s immutable measure for judging society—the Bible—with laws based increasingly on sentiments and preferences. As a result, America now finds itself in a quandary that is much more significant than whether Donald Trump will win in 2020. Assuming Trump gets reelected, as I argue he will, his term ends in 2025. Then what? Where is God in all of this?

I posed this question to David Barton, and he flipped it around: “When you look at where we are now, my question is not ‘Where is God,’ but it’s ‘Where are His people?’” Barton

believes the answer is not too good.

He has worked closely with researcher George Barna, who has conducted numerous polls on Christian values and beliefs. They polled a sampling of the 384,000 churches and senior pastors in America, and learned 70% of churches and senior pastors say they do not agree with the Bible in its most basic and orthodox teachings. Even so, that means 30% are what Barna and Barton call “theologically conservative churches.” Those pastors were asked, “Do you think the Bible applies to all issues of life?” The survey then specifically asked them about 14 areas, including immigration, education, unborn life, traditional marriage and national economics.

An overwhelming majority (between 91 and 97%, depending on which one of the 14 issues) agreed that the Bible did address these issues. However, most of them also admitted that they did not address those topics from the pulpit because they considered them “political issues.”

“But wait a minute,” Barton said rhetorically. “You just said the Bible teaches those issues and then you say, ‘No, if it’s in the news, that makes it political, and we won’t talk about it.’ So only a small fraction of pastors are addressing issues in the culture that the Bible also addresses.”

It’s as if the secularists have persuaded Christians that moral values in the Bible such as life or marriage are no longer the purview of the church once they become “political.” But as Barton wisely notes: “That’s not God’s problem. That’s our problem.”

But it’s only part of the problem these statistics show. Only 14% of Christians read the Bible on a daily basis, and only 10% of American adults have a biblical worldview. Even among Christians who say they are born again, only 31% have a biblical worldview, and only 4% of Millennials have a biblical worldview. This means we’re a nation that doesn’t think

biblically and doesn't even know what the Bible teaches.

"I talk to Christian university presidents, and they say that the kids coming out of youth group to their schools—even from Christian schools—don't know the difference between Jonah and Moses," Barton told me. "They don't even know the basic Bible stories. A good friend of mine was talking with a Christian young man, and the names Adam and Eve came up. The young man had no idea who they were—he'd never heard of them."

Several years ago, Barton and Barna coauthored a book called *U-Turn*, which noted there are more than 70 different moral behaviors in which the authors could not find any statistical difference between Christians and non-Christians.

As a lifelong Pentecostal, I've seen the secularized liberal drift of the church, even in circles once deemed to be biblically conservative. It starts with a lifestyle that is basically no different from the secular world. Then it progresses to liberal theology where they don't believe the Word of God anymore or even vote on important issues, such as whether same-sex marriage should be legal.

Historically, Pentecostals have been different. The holiness background of most major Pentecostal denominations called for very strict guidelines of personal behavior (and dress) and belief. There was a lot of focus on church attendance every time the doors were open. Even though many modern-day Pentecostal churches shy away from these views, which are now often considered "legalistic," as a journalist who has covered this segment of the church for years, I haven't seen Pentecostals experience the same sort of liberal drift theologically. Perhaps we have that holiness background to thank for the fact that there have never been resolutions in the annual meetings of any mainline Pentecostal denominations over liberalizing the rules on same-sex marriage or abortion.

But another form of compromise, liberalism and just plain

apathy affects the Pentecostals—and it may be the worst of them all. Few Pentecostal or charismatic pastors actually preach against sin, even if they don't change their theology to embrace it. They just leave it alone and focus on other things such as church growth, evangelizing or discipling new converts, or even missions giving. They like to preach on faith—and there's nothing wrong with that—but many of the sermons just make you feel good when you go home. Having a great church service where you feel the power of God is important, but today's services rarely mobilize the members to change culture or turn out the vote in crucial elections.

In one area, Pentecostals are ahead of most other Protestant groups because their churches are more integrated. In fact, the Assemblies of God has grown in membership for the past 17 years, mainly because of the growth of Hispanic and African American members. Latinos both in South America and in the U.S. seem to embrace the passion and excitement of the Pentecostal experience.

If you know your history, you know Pentecostalism grew out of the Azusa Street Revival, which was led by a black preacher named William Seymour, the son of former slaves. At its start, Pentecostalism was more integrated than other forms of Protestant Christianity, and racial diversity is still common in Pentecostal churches today. Pentecostal forms of worship where people shout, lift their hands and praise God exuberantly came from the black church experience, not from the formalism of the denominations the European immigrants brought with them.

Many "white" charismatic churches in America have a sizable percentage of black members who feel comfortable with the exuberant worship experience. But drill down, and you will find the same dichotomy within these integrated congregations as in the wider culture. The white congregants tend to be Republican, and the black members tend to be Democrat.

Why is this? In my book, I devote an entire chapter called “Black Americans, Democrats and Trump” to exploring why African Americans in this country vote Democratic in huge numbers. Suffice it to say, for the past half-century, Democrats have supported a few key policies important to black Americans. These include civil rights, prison reform and governmental aid for poor communities. As a result, I’ve been told by black Christian leaders that the black community overlooks the “faults” of Democrats, including many liberal policies. In fact, studies have shown that while black Christians align with white conservative Christians on most moral issues, they still vote Democrat by huge percentages.

On the Republican side, the GOP supports—or at least gives lip service to—some policies important to white conservative Christians, like abortion and same-sex marriage. So white Christians likewise vote Republican and overlook the things they disagree with, such as the way Republicans say one thing at election time and govern another way, supporting big business at the expense of the little guy and dragging the U.S. into meaningless wars.

Pentecostals who used to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit and emphasized speaking in tongues often relegate that to services later in the week or small groups or classes. And though Pentecostalism came out of the holiness movement of a century and a half ago, and was known for its holiness “do’s and don’ts” when I was growing up, rarely will you hear a sermon on holiness these days.

Barton also grew up Pentecostal and bemoans the modern church’s emphasis on conversions rather than discipleship.

“Right now, it’s all about converts and getting people to say the sinner’s prayer,” Barton told me. “Well, I can have a parakeet recite the sinner’s prayer. That doesn’t mean the parakeet is a Christian. We’ve moved away from discipleship, and as a result, we no longer see people thinking or behaving

the right way. We're not disciplining them. The real question is, how are they living? What's their behavior? Are they producing fruit worthy of repentance? There is a big emphasis on converts rather than disciples, and the irony is that, for 2,000 years, we have let the 'professionals' do the work of ministry."

A few months ago, I made this point in my "Perspective" column in *Charisma* by quoting Barton.

"We've got missionaries, evangelists and pastors, and they do the work of the ministry—but the Bible says they are to teach the ordinary saints to do the work of the ministry," he said. "So if every Christian made it their objective to bring one person to Christ this year and then disciple them to think biblically, at the end of this year, twice as much of the world—64%—would be Christian. And if we did that again the next year, we would have the entire world Christian in only two years—if every Christian just disciplined one other person."

Discipleship means teaching and modeling how to live a life set apart from the secular, godless culture. That set-apart life is what we used to call "holiness." "Be holy, for I am holy," the Bible says in 1 Peter 1:16b. But I've observed, and Barton agrees, that few are teaching holiness anymore.

"We're not finding people confronting wrong behavior, saying this is morally right or morally wrong," Barton says. "Few pastors are doing this. And not only are we not hitting the holiness aspect, but we largely don't have the fear of God anymore. There is no sense of having to account to God for our behavior, our beliefs, our thoughts—all the things the Bible teaches. So we have now become a user-friendly kind of a church. We don't want you feeling bad about things—we don't want you to radically change your life.

"Look at John 6 where Jesus was offending the crowds. Many left Him. His disciples said to Him, 'This is a hard teaching;

who can bear it?' He looked at them and asked, 'Are you guys leaving me too?' They answered, 'No, we'll stay with you. You've got the bread of life.' But man, this is really hard stuff! No American church I know of today is being accused of teaching hard stuff and driving people away, with true disciples remaining in the church to be taught more."

I agree. And this is part of the problem we face. As the culture declines and becomes more hostile to Christians and biblical principles, it boils down to a failure of the church that there's no teaching on holiness that would change people's lives and then motivate them to go out and change the culture.

The contemporary, self-effacing church culture hidden behind the walls of the meeting place is not up to Christianity's standards. A different type of church will be required for America to be born again. Budgets, buildings and bodies in seats can't be the theological focal point if America is to survive. Christians operating in the public square must be empowered by wisdom from above.

Barton said, "Get involved where you live—with your family, business, schools and local government—and let's look at how Christ applies to all of these areas. That's where I think the church is really failing."

It's like David Lane wrote once: "Jesus paid not only the price for our souls and eternal salvation, but to redeem everything that was lost: people, business, education and government. And there is nothing the devil can do to reverse it. That is, if believers will but engage."

Getting the church to be the church is necessary if we are to turn the tide in the culture. In this election year, I believe that means getting involved politically, and I make an impassioned plea to Christians to understand what's at stake if Trump loses. Not only will the other side roll back many of

the positive changes he made—rolling back regulations, appointing the right judges to the bench, supporting Israel and standing for religious freedom—but we may see laws hostile to Christians implemented.

My book makes the case for why Trump, controversial as he may be, must be reelected, but also why he might lose if evangelicals and other conservatives are complacent and stay home on election day, or if we let the other side get away with election fraud and they steal the election. I also make the case for what the Bible says about how to treat the immigrant and what it says about borders.

But more importantly, an entire section is about the “spiritual dimension” of this election. I describe some of the prophecies about the direction of our nation and how God has raised up Donald Trump. And I devote an entire chapter to “Donald Trump and Spiritual Warfare.” We must remember this isn’t just politics as usual because, as the Bible says, we “wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers” (Eph. 6:12a, KJV). This is something the secular press doesn’t cover because they don’t understand or agree with it. Even many Christians don’t understand this dimension. Yet we believe we have spiritual power against these spiritual forces.

The book ends with a call to prayer and action. We must pray as never before with many of the ministries that are calling for intercessory prayer. But we must also remember to get out and vote and encourage everyone in our spheres of interest to vote.

That’s what I’m doing, using every means at my disposal—not only writing this article and the book it’s based on, but doing podcasts, newsletters and media appearances too. This is my third book about the president, and I believe it’s the most important. I hope you will read it—not so I can sell another book, but to open your eyes to the issues and to enlist you in

the battle for our nation. The time has come to get involved, to pray, to vote—and to get others to do the same.

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE: If you liked this story, you can read more about the 2020 election at .

Stephen Strang is founding editor of Charisma. Listen to his podcast *The Strang Report on the Charisma Podcast Network*. This article was drawn from his new book, *God, Trump and the 2020 Election*, releasing Jan. 14, 2020. Find it at online booksellers and everywhere Christian books are sold.

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