

Bethel Pastor: American Church, It's Time to Speak Up!

Our country is in major turmoil, leaving many people longing for peace; they hope for a kind of “live and let live” society. All while much of the church remains silent for fear of rocking the boat too far. What is the outcome of these crazy “peace times?” Over 50% of the children in America are born out of wedlock! There is a fatherless epidemic in our country so severe that it's literally destroying our children and families. Suicide is now the second leading cause of death among teens, with a rate that's doubling every few years.

Personally, I am not OK with peace at any cost. Let alone this one. This may “sound un-Christian” but did you know that there was even a time in Jesus' ministry when the Prince of Peace Himself said, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword?” (Matt. 10:34b)

I'd like to propose that Jesus was not a peacekeeper, but a peacemaker. He was not afraid to offend people in order to create true peace. Jesus knew He was on a mission, and He did what His Father told Him to do, which sometimes meant upsetting the crowd. In essence, He used His voice to correct culture and make long-term peace.

Perhaps the body of Christ has traded passivity for a sense of false, temporary peace, relegating the world to turmoil. In doing so, we've allowed our lights to dim under a bushel of fear instead of shining bright as guiding lanterns to a world desperate for truth and clarity.

Use Your Voice

I've said it before and will gladly say it again—the body of

Christ is called to change culture for the kingdom of God. According to , more than 25 million Christians who are registered to vote do not vote in presidential elections, and as many as 65 million Christians do not vote in local elections. I can't think of a more practical way to impact culture than to have a voice in the laws that are shaping the world we live in. One would think that Christians empowered with voting ability would celebrate Election Day as an opportunity to tangibly influence and impact our culture. So why the passivity? I mean, why do Christians historically abstain from using their voices when we are quite literally handed an opportunity to influence culture every time a voting season comes around?

Perhaps this reflects the church's mindset on power and authority—they don't believe their vote matters and are influenced by the political spirit that creates profound pressure to make the right decision. This spirit divides and conquers through villainizing candidates, laws and measures and frames a high-stakes, black-and-white story about our nation of "good" vs. "evil." The fruit is division, anxiety and anger. The pressure from this spiritual force can be so strong that it may suppress our ability to see clearly and even go so far as to silence our voices, if we allow it. I'd like to propose that much of the church has lost or forgotten the ability to discern personal convictions from the agenda of the political spirit.

But think about it this way: when we choose not to vote, we're handing our power over and letting other people make decisions for us. If everyone thought like this, then the very few people who did vote would be controlling *all* policy. That doesn't sound like democracy to me!

Voting on Hope

As I've dived into the world of government and politics over the last decade, the Holy Spirit has revealed a new mindset to

me regarding God's perspective on politics. It's through this new understanding that I've been able to see that politicians, for the most part, genuinely desire to do the "right thing." They lay down their lives for the things they believe in (whether I agree with those beliefs is another question). However, for the most part, their intentions are not to be power-mongers. This was honestly surprising to me because I generally jumped to thinking that most political agendas were not thought all the way through, or I immediately took on a "they're wrong" attitude.

What I've learned now is that most government leaders are doing their best with the information they have in order to make some very hard decisions on often very complicated issues. When we can separate our discernment from the political spirit, we're empowered to vote with a hope-filled attitude.

Let's unpack this by drawing from wisdom from the book of Nehemiah. I can see clearly how God deposits hope in the dark places of culture to motivate His people into being agents of change. Chapter 2:17-18 says:

Finally, I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem is devastated and its gates are burned with fire. Come, and let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no more be a reproach." Then I told them that the hand of my God had been good to me and also about the king's words that he had spoken to me.

And they said, "Let us rise up and build!" So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he recognized the problem the Israelites were living in. He acknowledged the trouble but quickly moved on to say, "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." Nehemiah demonstrated that even in recognizing the realities of dark

times, God's people have been created to shine and become a part of the solution.

There is a reason you have been empowered with a vote—so that creation itself will be set free from its bondage of decay and brought into glorious freedom (Rom. 8:22). Your act of voting is a part of the solution of the sons of God being made manifest through the rebuilding of a government, culture and economy that reflects heaven's!

A Call to Action

God cares greatly about governmental realities, and He is able to lead imperfect people in an extremely troubled world. He's chosen to use us, His people, to impact and influence those realities! You've been given liberty and power to affect the race that you and your children's children have been called to run. Engage in the race! Use your vote to impact your city, your state and your nation.

For more insight on Bethel's approach to impacting our city and culture, check out how we address our community needs in this article written by the *San Francisco Chronicle* or listen to this podcast where I discuss how to impact a city with the Daily Signal.

For those in California:

You can register and vote anytime between now and March 3, 2020.

Go to in California to find out where you can register and vote on the same day between now and on Election Day.

If you are in Shasta County, head down to the county clerk's office at 1643 Market Street and register and vote the same day. If you want to change your vote, you can exchange your ballot there as well. If you want to turn in your absentee ballot and track that ballot, go to , and you can track your

ballot to make sure it safely arrived and has been counted.
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