

Doug Stringer: Divided Church Breeding Divided Nation

In a matter of hours, America will cast its vote for the office of the president. I know I'm at risk of possibly getting some criticism from friends on opposing sides on how they think everyone else should vote. Yet, I am also convicted of my responsibility to at least share my thoughts not just about the this Election Day, but of what I believe to be of a deeper issue that brought us to where we are as the church. Regardless of what many may think, it's not as simple as 1, 2, 3. It's far more complex than that. How we walk through the next few weeks and months in the aftermath of the current election is of great importance as well.

To be completely honest, I have had a difficult time in trying to determine which of the candidates to give my vote. There are challenges to me in supporting either candidate. On one side is a candidate who is part of a religious sect not belonging to orthodox Christianity, with which I have significant points of disagreement. On the other side is an incumbent president who I believe has mishandled so many responsibilities, most especially how he has dealt with the issues of abortion, traditional marriage and relations with Israel. Neither of these candidates represent a biblical ideology or traditional Christian faith.

But despite my challenges in picking a candidate, I know that as a Christian and an American, I have both a right and a responsibility to vote. We all do. Not to vote is to make a decision by default.

I think it's important to take a look at how we wound up in this position in the first place. How did we come to a place in history where these are the options we have for who will lead our country? How is it that there is not a candidate who

more closely embodies our values, priorities and principles?

Regardless of who ultimately has won the election, I believe there is a deeper root issue that we must also address. We, who call ourselves men and women of faith in Christ—as well as those who believe in the foundations of America’s Judeo-Christian beliefs—must be sober to the the fact that the spiritual and political crises of our day is largely due to our own neglect.

A Tribe Divided

The answer to this question and the responsibility for how we got here lies with the church. The **body of Christ** is potentially the strongest voice and largest group of influence within our nation. But because we are so divided, split by our personal preferences—be the party affiliation, pet agendas, race and ethnicity, economic status, or social class—we have lost our influence and our voice is barely heard above the fodder. We should be speaking to the nation as one, but instead our many divisions keep us bickering among one another.

The church in America, much the same way, should be the greatest and largest influence in the nation. In my own city of Houston, within the nation’s Bible Belt, there are megachurches and congregations representing tens of thousands of people. The same is true around the nation. So why do we not hold greater influence in who becomes our candidates for office? Our internal divisions have diminished our place of influence. And who is to say we are not also to blame for the deep division in the nation as a whole?

Whose Agenda Comes First?

The sad truth is that many of us have erected our own golden calves that we give allegiance over our allegiance to the kingdom of God. These modern-day golden calves might be our race, ethnicity or social class. They might be our family or denomination’s traditional political affiliation. They might

be our personal preferences or pet political agendas—be they economic, cultural or otherwise. While many of these things may be good or honorable in nature, we have too often placed them as a higher priority than the agenda of God.

Matthew 6:33 is a verse we are all familiar with: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” This is a verse that we preach and say we believe, but how often are we really doing it? And could it be that the other issues we care about are part of what God would Himself take care of if we would only put His kingdom first?

The heart of God is that if we take up God’s cause first, He will take up ours. What are the things that are important to us? Family values? The economy? Immigration? Abortion? **Traditional marriage**? Race relations? Social justice issues? I believe that God wants to bring all of these things into alignment in our nation. But we cannot let our own personal preferences be put above the agenda of God—the things of the kingdom.

If we do not put God first, we will inevitably end up losing ground on the very things that we’re passionate about. Just like the tribe of Manasseh lost their influence, becoming the smallest and least influential of all the tribes, so we have become diminished in our ability to influence the issues that are most important to us.

Peace in Politics?

The Bible says that when a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him (Prov. 16:7). I believe if we would align ourselves in a way that pleases the Lord, even those who oppose us or have different agendas would become beneficiaries of God’s blessing and favor upon us. This would do much to bring healing to our divided land.

If the church will put the kingdom of God first and build on foundation of Christ alone, all of our personal passions and agendas can be worked out. But if we put these things first and try to build upon a foundation other than Jesus, we become powerless and as a result the nation as a whole suffers.

God's Agenda for the Election

If you listen to much of the media, you undoubtedly heard that the election is all about the **economy**. But this election is about more than the economy. Yes, our economy is in crisis. But if we put God first, I believe we would see His blessing return to our national economy. In previous elections when we were told, "It's the economy, stupid," many Christians compromised their convictions. And we can still see the moral repercussions of it today.

I believe that God's agenda for this election centers around these three things:

1. Our stance toward Jerusalem and our relations with the state of Israel;
2. The biblical view of marriage;
3. Issues of life, especially the unborn.

In one party's national convention this year, there had to be a vote to reinstate God into their party platform because He had been removed. They put it to a vote to reinsert God into the platform and to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. It took three different votes to pass the measure; but even the third time, there was much dissension and boos from the crowd. Who ever thought there'd be a struggle in our nation to reinstate God?

There are also those who want to change the definition of marriage to include same-sex relationships, and those who want to make all **abortion** legal, even into the third trimester.

Even worse, they want taxpayers to have to fund those who perform abortions.

Isaiah 1:15 says, "So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood." Because our hands are stained with the blood of the innocent, our religious gatherings are worthless. Because we have not treated human life as precious and protected the most innocent among us, God does not acknowledge our **prayers**.

Isaiah 1 discusses both justice and righteousness. This should speak to Christians in all political parties. On one side there are Christians who may lean to the left politically because of social justice issues. There are others who lean to the right who emphasize truth and righteousness. But God's intention was never that we should have to choose between the two. We must uphold both. I believe if we as believers would become one voice, we could have the strongest voice influencing both parties and we wouldn't have to make the kind of choices we're having to make today.

Examine Your Heart

My intention is not to tell anyone how to vote. But my admonishment is for us to be honest with ourselves. Are our decisions based on our personal preferences? Or are our decisions made first and foremost on what brings honor to God, putting His ideology above our preferences? Scripture is clear that if my way pleases the Lord, he will make a way for me, opening doors no man can shut. God has a way of making room for me and the things that are important to me.

There are many media spin doctors and pundits trying to cloud the issues. My challenge to you and to myself is that we seek the face of God and consider what choice we can make that is based on His ideology and not the ideology of men. As followers of Jesus, we must live by our convictions based on the character of Christ rather than our personal agendas and

preferences.

Our personal preferences are influenced by many factors, but our ideology must be surrendered through Christ to the kingdom of God. We must choose according to His righteousness, and for many it will take courage to step above the crowd and live and vote our convictions.

I encourage you to vote. Throughout Scripture are sins of omission, where men abdicate their influence by neglecting to do the right thing, and sins of commission, to proactively sin against God and others with a heart of rebellion in action contrary to the ideology of the kingdom of God. I believe that if the church remains silent, it is a sin of omission.

There is the usual spin and political fodder during each election. There is no question about the intellectual capacity of our candidates, nor their abilities. This is, however, a historic and crucial moment for the church and our nation. Will the church regain its voice of influence? Or will the church in America lose its voice and diminish its influence by being divided in too many areas?

We must cross our racial and denominational lines to meet at the cross of Christ. There are those who have their rainbow coalition, but I would like to submit to you that God has His coat of many colors. Joseph, in the book of Genesis, received a great gift—a coat of many colors. Jesus said, “My family are those who do the will of the Father.”

I believe one of the greatest gifts our heavenly Father wants to present to His son Jesus is a coat of many colors—the beauty of black, brown, red, yellow and white. God is not colorblind. He loves the beauty and diversity of His creation. Together, when we put Him as Lord over us, with the commonality of the cross of Christ, it will become one of the greatest gifts presented to His Son Jesus.

May we truly seek *first* the kingdom of God and His

righteousness, *then* all the things that are of great importance will be added unto us.

Regardless of who we elect either by commission or omission, the deeper issues in the heart and message of the church must be brought into alignment with the One we say we serve. The battle for the very heart of the church will impact the battle for the very soul of our nation and generation.

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