

Jesus Looks Beyond Politics

People didn't vote in ancient Israel, nor did they put "KICK THE ROMANS OUT!" bumper stickers on their chariots. But there was plenty of political anger seething in Palestine, even without Fox News, CNN and MSNBC around to stir the pot.

Jews especially abhorred tax-collectors, since (1) tax-collectors were usually thieves, and (2) they worked for the hated Roman Empire. Yet when a chief tax-collector named Zacchaeus showed up to hear Jesus preach in Jericho, Jesus did an unlikely thing. He called Zacchaeus down from his perch in a sycamore tree and proposed a meeting at his house.

I'm sure the crowd was shocked that a holy rabbi who honored the **Ten Commandments** would fraternize with one of Caesar's cronies. They probably expected Jesus to give Zacchaeus a stern lecture on the evils of embezzlement. But the Bible doesn't say Jesus talked to him about his fraud or the injustice of Roman occupation. Their meeting was not about politics.

After one visit with Jesus, the infamous Zacchaeus, who was "small in stature," experienced a great big conversion. He repented of his crimes and pledged to give half his possessions to the poor (see Luke 19:1-10). Jesus' act of kindness led to a total heart change.

This was Jesus' style. He looked beyond race, class, social labels and sectarian divisions. He was as comfortable talking to prostitutes, drunkards and condemned criminals as He was to synagogue officials, high priests and Roman centurions. He looked into men's hearts with a piercing laser beam, not so He could judge their sins but so He could shine the light of His mercy.

And today Jesus calls His followers to love everybody* that way. *NOTE: "Everybody" includes Democrats, Republicans,

bleeding-heart liberals, Tea Party conservatives, Jesse Jackson, Rush Limbaugh, left-leaning journalists, right-leaning journalists, President Obama, Mitt Romney, Joe Biden, Paul Ryan—and, yes, Clint Eastwood!

I'm saying this now (and preaching to myself) because too many of us are losing our religion in the current presidential campaign—which promises to grow more divisive before Election Day. It's not just political commentators who are screaming at each other like banshees on Sunday-morning talk shows; Christians are unfriending each other on Facebook because campaign rhetoric has grown so hateful. We can't even eat a chicken sandwich without triggering a war of words.

I propose we make some attitude adjustments so we can reflect Christ both during the campaign season and after Nov. 6—regardless of whether Obama or Romney wins.

1. Love people regardless of their political views. I'm involved in a Christian ministry that confronts the abuse of women globally. Yet there are many people in the secular arena, including Hollywood celebrities such as Susan Sarandon and George Clooney, who share my concern about domestic violence and sex trafficking. Recently, I had to face the ugly fact that I had made bitter judgments against these people because of their left-leaning views. How can I be a vessel of Christ's love if my heart is full of hate?

2. Quit making politicians into gods. At the root of today's angry rhetoric is the mistaken idea that politics can solve our moral problems. Christians in the United States, especially since the early 1980s, have embraced an unhealthy infatuation with presidents and political power. We clamor for a King Saul to save us when God wants us to trust Him alone.

News flash! Ronald Reagan didn't save us. Neither did Bush No. 1, Clinton or Bush No. 2. Neither Obama nor Romney will deliver us. And let's not forget that the greatest

spiritual revival in this country in the past 100 years occurred during the presidential terms of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon—one Democrat and one Republican! The **charismatic movement** of the 1960s and '70s was not a program of either party.

3. Frame your words with kindness. In our culture it has become in vogue to be hot-headed. Candidates and commentators throw vitriolic barbs like grenades, and when the discussion is moved online, everyone starts dropping F-bombs to prove their point. There is no such thing today as civil debate. In modern American politics, we thrust, jab, kick, punch, skewer and impale each other with our words. And this is equally true of Democrats and Republicans.

There is a higher way for people of faith. The apostle Paul called us to season our conversation with grace (see Col. 4:6) and to put on a heart of compassion, kindness and gentleness (see Col. 3:12). But we can't express kind words if our hearts are full of judgment, racial bias, hatred of certain people or organizations, or anger toward those we disagree with. If you hold judgments in your heart, they will become like buried mines in a battlefield. When someone walks near them and pushes your button, you will explode.

We must speak the truth, but we must say it in love. It would be better for us to keep our mouths shut if we can't say what Jesus is saying with His tone of voice.

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