

Leadership in an Angry and Divided Nation

Barring some kind of freak election scenario with hanging chads in a key swing state like Florida in 2000, America will wake up on Nov. 9, 2016, to the sober realization that we have elected a new president. Whether it is Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton, the president-elect will begin leading with the reality that roughly one-half of the nation doesn't just dislike—but viscerally hates—him or her.

Most American citizens, for very different reasons are angry, *really angry*.

Bernie Sanders supporters are angry at Hillary Clinton's corruption and crony capitalism. Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz supporters are angry at conservatives that supported or helped Trump in the primary. Trump supporters and members of the Tea Party are totally furious that the GOP Establishment did not stand up stronger against Obama. The GOP Establishment is reeling because they argue that Trump hijacked the Republican Party, that he is utterly uncivil and that his presence has caused other down ballot Republican candidates to lose in races with small victory margins.

Most disconcerting of all, evangelical Christians are angry at each other. Some are upset that #NeverTrump Christians voted for third-party candidates, which helped Clinton with little regard for the future of the Supreme Court. Others are upset that Christian leaders were willing to risk compromising their witness to an unbelieving world by openly promoting a man whose personal moral history is deplorable.

Whether Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump wins, it seems inevitable that America will be angrier and more divided. This heightened "national anger" and division will present a major

challenge in the ongoing struggle to maintain a civil and orderly society. Within the Church, we will have continuing challenges to achieve unity, advance God's kingdom, and effectively proclaim the gospel.

In some ways, I am just as concerned with what happens in the days following Nov. 9, as I am with the outcome of the election itself.

What should our response, as Christians, be to this unfortunate national chaos?

When the election results are announced, millions of Americans will feel a sense of despair, disenfranchisement and indifference. For various reasons, many will be tempted to withdraw and give up on active citizenship and self-government and may even go so far as to do something radical and foolish to perpetuate social unrest. Sadly, these reactions will not be limited to the culture at large but will also be found within the Christian community.

If you are a pastor or Christian leader and you think that this strife does not exist within your church or ministry, think again.

What should our response, as Christians, be to this unfortunate national chaos?

What can we say and do to bring spiritually clear thinking in the midst of confusion? How can Christian leaders navigate healing between angry, divided and emotional souls into the future?

Here are five ways I believe Christian leaders can and should honor God as they lead others in "the days after" Nov. 8:

1. Christian principles hold the key to creating a civilized society and ultimately bringing peace between men, and between man and God. The ideas of religious liberty and the rights of

conscience were birthed during the Reformation. These seeds of faith need to be germinated again today to robustly grow and create civility in our citizens. A Judeo-Christian worldview gave birth to the freedoms of the American experience. What the secular left does not understand is that when they undermine a person's deeply held religious Christian faith, beliefs and values they are actually undermining the very roots of the freedom they rely upon to oppose us. The concepts of separation of powers, rule of law, a written constitution, federalism, all men being created equal—these are ideas which spring from Christian history and the principles of Scripture. Most importantly, Christ has the power to enable men to see the reality of their own human condition. Christianity frees the human heart from its bondage to sin. Steps toward final resolution of our nation's internal warring against ourselves can only be found when we first individually make peace with God. When we truly understand the high price that was paid for our own forgiveness and then offered as free gift, how can we withhold our forgiveness of others.

2. We must start the peacemaking process in our own personal relationships. If you bitterly resent that #NeverTrump member of your family or church who voted third party (helping Clinton), then either choose to forgive them in your heart or directly reconcile. If you have grudges against Christians who were helping Trump in the primary, you must clear your heart and mind toward them as well. The same applies to those who foolishly supported Hillary Clinton outright. Whoever it is you would rather avoid and not talk with, much less serve or fellowship with because of their politics, is precisely the person you need to start restoring your relationship with. C.S. Lewis once said, *"We all agree that forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it."* Before we can help the culture heal, we need to start with our own hearts. The cause of the gospel and the survival of the republic demand that we make things right between us so we can move forward in unity.

3. We need to develop a long-term view with long-range plans to win back the culture and our government. Many leaders and funders of the conservative movement trying to change society only think and invest in the short term, or election to election. We find that Christian leaders are typically concerned with either the culture or politics—but seldom both. For instance, restoring a culture of marriage and family may take many decades. We should start with our own families and churches. We can never give up believing in, fighting for, and protecting the non-negotiables, both in the political and cultural realm. These are the very foundations of our civilization. We need to begin to develop the same kind of long range and tenacious perspective on these issues as the pro-life movement did after the *Roe v. Wade* ruling in 1973. The “idea of America” is slipping away and unless we have a long-term, disciplined strategy and vision to win the hearts and minds of future generations, we will have little chance of winning elections or controlling political decision-making in the future.

4. Remember that God is sovereign and we have no other choice but to trust Him for our future. Statements like these are often made by Christians, but seldom truly understood for the life-changing power they contain. The truth of God’s sovereignty is also commonly misapplied to the wrong side of history. When we are faced with evil and injustice, we have a moral responsibility to make choices and act in accordance with God’s Word. However, when evil and injustice are in the past and behind us, we must rest in God’s sovereign plan realizing that His ways are higher than our ways. God is constantly intervening in history and He can be trusted with the future, even if we do not fully understand His plan.

5. There is still some good in this world and it’s worth fighting for. No matter how dark and desperate the world appears, *Christians must never lose hope*. Relentless hope should be ingrained in our DNA. Our faith and trust cannot be

ultimately in the government, or in any leader, but only in God Himself. Scripture shows that God often does his best redemptive work in dark and desperate times. Christ's brutal torture and death on the cross is "Exhibit A" that God can use even the darkest moments in world history for His Glory and for our ultimate good; even when we don't understand why. In . Tolkien's epic *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Sam urges Frodo to not to give up on his mission—though the journey will be dark and desperate. He pleads, *"There is some good in this world Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for!"* When we see a man and a woman commit themselves for life unconditionally in marriage; when we hold and look into the eyes of a baby who has been rescued from abortion; when we place that same newborn into the loving hands of a family; when our families are able to teach, guide and protect children from the many dangers and deceptions of this world; when we are free to exercise and live out our faith without governmental interference; when we see the tears of others who have come to faith—*these things* are examples of the good in this world that is always worth fighting for. Looking forward, we need to develop a kind of spiritual resilience that shields us from discouragement, cynicism and the temptation to give up when the path is difficult. As long as God gives us breath, we must be willing to run the race and fight the good fight.

Christians understand there is a time for peace and a time for anger. But they also understand that "the anger of man does not bring about the righteousness of God." Let us think and pray now for the discernment to know the difference as we lead others into this next season of our nation's history. {eo}

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