

Our Delicate Dance With Donald Trump

In April 2016 I wrote an article titled, “Donald Trump is Not Your Protector: A Warning to Conservative Christians.” It began with a strong word of caution: “Donald Trump has presented himself as a protector of conservative Christians and as the best friend Christians will ever have. He has held up his mother’s Bible and pledged to bring Christ back into Christmas. But when the rubber meets the road, he is anything but the defender of conservative Christians and their values.”

It ended with an even stronger caution: “If you’re a Trump supporter, you might say, ‘I know he’s not a Christian and I don’t even think he’s a real conservative, but I’m voting for him because I believe he’s the best man to fix our economy and protect our borders.’ I beg to differ, but I can respect that position. But please don’t look to him to be a defender of conservative Christian values or a protector of religious freedoms. Barring dramatic divine intervention in his life, you will be sadly disappointed.

“Be forewarned.”

This was written, of course, before Trump became the Republican Party candidate.

Before it became a race between him and Hillary Clinton.

Before he appointed three conservative justices to the Supreme Court, leading to the overturning of Roe in 2022.

Before he issued an executive order overturning the Johnson Amendment.

Before he moved the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem.

Before I voted for him in 2016 and then in 2020.

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Looking back now, in some ways, I was clearly wrong about Trump. He kept his word on many essential promises, he kept his door open to evangelical leaders and stood up for many issues of importance to us. He did not simply use us to get elected and then discard us, as I feared he would.

That's why, with hope but some trepidation, I voted for him in 2016 and then, with more confidence and less trepidation, in 2020, especially in light of the other presidential choices.

This was one time I was glad to say I was wrong—but only in one sense.

In another sense, the warning was spot-on, as to this day, the former president does not share some of our core convictions in full, in particular when it comes to issues like abortion and LGBTQ activism.

And so, on the one hand, he says that, as a rebuke to President Biden's horrifically timed, Good Friday-Easter Sunday announcement about the "Transgender Day of Visibility," as president, he will create a "Christian Visibility Day."

On the other hand, a gay website reported just five weeks ago that "Donald Trump gave his approval to a same-sex wedding ceremony taking place at his Florida mansion, Mar-a-Lago, last Friday. The nuptials took place between two men, at least one of whom is active within the Log Cabin Republicans. The organization represents gay supporters of the GOP."

And it was on Dec. 16, 2022, that Politico posted a report about a gala, Log Cabin Republican (meaning, gay Republican) event at Mar-a-Lago, in which, "the main attraction, obviously, was Trump. He received a standing ovation after delivering an enthusiastic affirmation of gay rights not often heard in the GOP.

“‘We are fighting for the gay community, and we are fighting and fighting hard,’ the former president and 2024 candidate said. ‘With the help of many of the people here tonight in recent years, our movement has taken incredible strides; the strides you’ve made here [are] incredible.’

“Throughout the evening, speakers praised Trump for his embrace of the gay community. They credited him for his initiatives to combat the criminalization of homosexuality, his work pushing for public health initiatives to combat the HIV epidemic, and for appointing the first openly gay Cabinet member, Grenell, as director of national intelligence.”

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Need I say more?

My counsel, then, to all followers of Jesus, especially to pastors and leaders, is this: You may choose to vote for Trump because of his policies, especially in contrast with the Democratic alternative.

You may appreciate his efforts to stand up for Christian liberties and defend our rights.

But in no way should you look to him to lead the way in bringing about the moral or cultural transformation of our nation, let alone the spiritual transformation. He may point to the Bible as his favorite book, but it remains clear by his actions and words that the contents of that book are not yet written deeply on his heart, nor does he have an intimate personal relationship with its divine author.

More importantly, we must learn the painful lessons from the last eight years, during which time many of us became better known as supporters of Trump—if not apologists for Trump—than as followers of Jesus. In doing so, we deeply damaged our

witness and drove many Americans, especially young Americans, away from Jesus.

That's why I posted this on X:

My advice to pastors and Christian leaders as we enter the thick of this volatile election season: Lift up Jesus, preach Jesus, point people to Jesus, be identified as a Jesus follower – lead with Jesus! – and then vote your conscience and encourage others to do the same.

– Dr. Michael L. Brown (@DrMichaelLBrown) April 3, 2024

And rather than looking to President Trump to proclaim a “Christian Visibility Day,” let's shine the light 24/7.

(For my encouragement to believers to celebrate April 14 as “Not Ashamed of Jesus Day” and the reasons for it, go here.)
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