

Part 2: Does God Want Pastors to Stay Silent About Politics?

In part one of this two-part article, I discussed five points that pastors should think about when consider whether or not to preach politics from the pulpit. I reiterate that if you're a pastor during this election season, the easy path is to say nothing about politics.

You won't step on anybody's toes. Nobody will walk out in the middle of your sermon. You won't lose disgruntled members (and donors!). A few people might ask you to say more about politics, and they will grumble, but they won't leave the church. You're safe.

But does God want you to stay silent at this time?

Here are five more points to consider. Whether you are a Trump supporter or a Biden supporter or somewhere in between, I intend my first seven points, including numbers 6 and 7 here, to apply to you, because I believe a democracy is healthy when differing views are expressed thoughtfully and carefully.

My last three points will be based on my own preferences in this election. Here are my final five points:

6. Some people may leave your church, but the question is, have you been faithful to God? Just last week a pastor told me that when he gave a message on political issues, one couple became angry and left the church. I replied that does not mean he was wrong. It may just mean that he was faithfully teaching the Word of God and they rejected its teachings. (Later he told me that he had had a good conversation with them, and they decided to return.)

People walked out on Jesus when He began to preach unpopular truths (John 6:66), and the people in His hometown of Nazareth were so troubled by His teaching that they even tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:29). Paul was a remarkably successful evangelist to the Gentiles, but opponents who disliked his message eventually drove him out of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 13:50;14:5-6, 19; 17:5, 13-14). Yet at the end of his life, he had the joy of knowing that he had been faithful to God: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, and I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

If you believe that God is calling you to speak on some political/moral issues, it is important to settle in your mind beforehand that a sense of God's approval on your speaking will be more valuable to you than avoiding the (possible) loss of some friendships and supporters. That is a decision that only you can make. And who knows if God will bring more people to your church in response to your faithfulness?

7. Pastors today have an unusual opportunity to influence the direction of history. Will it make a difference whether you speak on politics or not? Yes, it will make a difference. I recently spoke at a local church about the issues at stake in this election, and what surprised me was the thoughtful, mature people who came up to me afterward and said, "Thank you for that clear explanation. I was so confused. I didn't know what to think." In my opinion, most pastors would be amazed at how many people in their churches aren't sure how to vote this year, and aren't even sure if they will vote at all.

What if you persuaded just 10 people to vote who otherwise would not have voted? Then if only 1,000 pastors like you influenced just 10 people to vote, that would be 10,000 additional votes. (Remember, George W. Bush won the presidency in 2000 by just 537 votes in the state of Florida.) And you might persuade more than 10 people. "In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not let your hand rest; because you do not know which activity will find success" (a). The

nation is at a decision point, and you have a unique opportunity to influence the outcome.

Will you succeed? Will your preferred candidate win? No one knows. The question is whether you have done your part. In years to come, will you be able to look back on 2020 and know that you were faithful to God's guidance in doing what you were able to do?

8. This election is about more than the next four years. The policies that Democrats and Republicans promise to enact have never in my lifetime been so different, perhaps never in American history (for the differences, see my "Letter to an Anti-Trump Christian Friend," and also the platforms of Democratic and Republican parties—the Republicans kept their 2016 platform for 2020). America is truly at a turning point, and because of the immense power that judges now have, this election could set the direction of our nation not just for the next four years, but for the next 10 or 20 years or even more.

Let me explain why. If Joe Biden wins the election, and if Democrats gain a majority in the Senate, the Democratic platform promises to make Washington, D.C., the 51st state (p. 58-59), which would automatically add two more Democratic senators to the U.S. Senate, making it more difficult for Republicans to ever regain a majority. And their platform holds open the possibility of making Puerto Rico the 52nd state (p. 59), giving a potential of yet two more Democratic senators.

Present Trump has appointed and the Senate has so far confirmed 212 judges who now serve in the 852 district and circuit judgeships in the United States. But that positive influence on the judicial system could be quickly diluted because the Democratic platform says they are committed to "creating new federal district and circuit judgeships" (p. 38).

Trump has also appointed two of the nine Supreme Court justices (Gorsuch and Kavanaugh), and, with the death of Justice Ginsburg, he may yet be able to appoint a third justice giving the court a 6-3 majority of conservative or "originalist" justices who will rule according to the original meaning of the Constitution and laws (but Chief Justice John Roberts is an unreliable originalist vote). Whoever wins this presidential election will likely be able to choose one or perhaps two justices (Breyer is 82, Thomas is 72 and Alito is 70).

Even if no one retires, several Democrats have raised the possibility of adding six new seats to the Supreme Court, which could give a 9-6 majority of young, "living Constitution" judges who do not consider themselves subject to the original meanings of the Constitution and laws, but think that they have the authority to rewrite these documents according to what they now think the Constitution or law should have said.

The result would be one politically far-left policy after another imposed on the country, not by laws passed through Congress and signed by the president, but by judicial rulings that would find a way to claim that these rulings are "constitutional" and therefore impossible to change by any future president or Congress.

But if President Trump is reelected, the next four years will look very different from the Democratic vision. Trump will likely appoint one or two more Supreme Court justices and hundreds of additional district and circuit court judges who believe that "no one is above the law," and therefore they will not consider themselves to be above the Constitution and the laws and able to give them new meanings, but rather will consider themselves to be subject to the law, understood according to the meaning of the words at the time the law or the Constitution itself were written. Therefore, new laws will only be created, not by the novel ideas of powerful judges,

but as they should be created: through the actions of state legislatures and governors and the actions of the U.S. Congress and the president, all of whom are accountable to the people through the election process.

9. Genuine threats to religious freedom. In my view, the most troubling possibility is the threat of a significant loss of religious freedom that would likely follow a Biden-Harris victory. The Democratic platform promises, “We will reject the Trump administration’s use of broad religious exemptions to allow businesses, medical providers, social service agencies and others to discriminate.”

This sentence, if understood in the context of recent Democratic policy advocacy and judicial activism, predicts a whole series of lawsuits attempting to force Christians in businesses to violate their consciences by requiring that their insurance plans pay for abortifacient medicines, abortions and sex-change surgeries. It predicts that doctors, nurses and other medical professionals would be required to participate in abortions or lose their jobs. It predicts that professional counselors would be prohibited from attempting to help homosexual men and women who want to begin to live a heterosexual lifestyle. It predicts that Christian bakeries, photographers and florists would face heavy fines for “discrimination” and be driven into bankruptcy if they refused to bake a cake, take wedding photographs or provide flower arrangements for same-sex weddings. The 2020 Democratic platform says Democrats will “reject” the Trump administration’s “broad religious exemptions” that today are still protecting Christians from such government oppression.

In addition, this platform statement predicts that Christian adoption agencies and foster care agencies would be put out of business because of “discrimination” unless they were willing to place children with homosexual, lesbian and transgender couples. It predicts that Christian schools and colleges would be forced to close because of “discrimination” unless they

allowed transgender students to use restrooms, locker rooms, showers and on-campus housing that corresponds to their chosen “gender identity” rather than their biological sex. And, if Canada and some European countries provide a precedent, this statement predicts that even pastors and other Christian leaders might be prosecuted for hate speech if they dare to speak publicly against any aspect of the LGBT-plus agenda.

10. What political issues could a pastor preach about today?

Here are some suggestions of topics on which Democrats and Republicans clearly differ, and on which I think the Bible does give helpful guidance:

—**Religious freedom:** the “free exercise” of religion includes life outside the walls of the church, which we should be able to live according to our consciences (Heb. 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:16; Acts 5:29; Dan. 3:13-20; 1 Cor. 10:31).

—**Obeying the law:** The Bible requires that we obey the law (-5; 1 Pet. 2:13-14), except when it commands us to sin against God (Acts 5:29). Therefore: 1) judges do not have a right to change the meaning of laws or of our highest human law, the American Constitution (the Constitution provides another means of changing laws); 2) peaceful protests are lawful, but rioting, looting, arson and assaulting police officers are not lawful or morally right

—**Abortion:** Unborn children should be protected by law (Ex. 21:22-25; Ps. 51:5, 139:13; Deut. 30:19-20).

—**Sexual orientation and gender identity:** Governments should not require us to treat biological males like females and biological females like males (Gen. 1:27; Lev. 12:2-5; 18:22; Num. 27:8-9; Deut. 22:5; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Tim. 5:1-2; Tit. 2:2-6).

—**Marijuana:** Medical marijuana should be allowed by law and regulated like other medicines, but recreational marijuana is highly destructive to a society and should be prohibited (Eph.

5:18; 1 Pet. 4:7; 1 Thess. 5:6-8; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 9:21, 21:8).

—Immigration and border security: How does God want us to wisely apply the command to “love the sojourner” () as well as the commands to be subject to the government and obey its laws (Rom. 13:1-5)? If we dislike current immigration laws, what is the best way to get those laws changed? Is it right for a nation to have a wall to protect its borders? (Ex. 22:21, 23:9; Deut. 10:19; Ps. 122:7, 51:18; 2 Chron. 36:19; Neh. 1:3, 2:17; Prov. 25:28).

—Global warming/climate change: Did God create an earth with such beneficial energy sources as coal, oil and natural gas, but also booby-trap them so that by using them, we would destroy the earth? Or did He create an earth with self-correcting mechanisms and long-term cycles of gradual warming and cooling? (Gen. 1:28, 31; 1 Tim. 4:4-5, 6:17; Gen. 9:11; Ps. 104:9; Jer. 5:22; Isa. 45:18). [Note: I list the alleged threat of catastrophic global warming as an issue here because it is one of the primary rationales behind the push by Democrats for ever-increasing government control of our lives. For more information see the Cornwall Alliance or chapter 41 of my *Christian Ethics*.]

—Military power: How strong should our military power be? Should we be committed to using it if necessary to defend a smaller ally (Taiwan, South Korea, Israel) against a powerful aggressor or to keep the world’s sea lanes free from modern-day pirates and attacks by rogue nations? (Deut. 7:1-3, 10:1; Josh. 1:6-9; Rom. 13:3-4).

—Other topics (where both parties agree): I have not included in this list some topics on which Republican and Democratic leaders agree, such as 1) racism is evil; 2) we must continually defend against terrorist attacks and 3) we must continue to pursue effective therapies and vaccines against the COVID-19 virus.

—Still other topics (where evangelical Christians might not agree): I have also not included in this list several other topics on which Republicans and Democrats generally differ, and about which there may be more differences among evangelical Christians. I myself have clear convictions on these issues (see my books *Christian Ethics*, *Politics According to the Bible* and *The Poverty of Nations*), but I recognize that pastors might decide not to discuss these, or might want to address them in some other forum than the Sunday morning sermon:

—Tax rates.

—Economic growth.

—The best way to help the poor and find effective solutions to poverty.

—Government regulation of businesses: more or less?

—School choice.

—Israel.

—Firearms and self-defense.

—Foreign policy.

What about a Write-in Vote for President?

The ability to vote is a stewardship given to us by God, and essential to that stewardship is a responsibility to affect the outcome of an election. By placing us in a country that has a democratic form of government and not a dictatorship or monarchy, we each have a small role as part of the “governing authority” that God has placed over our nation. “We the people” are in fact the human rulers of our nation. By voting, we play a role in governing. By voting, we are acting as “God’s servant” for the “good” of the people as a whole (see Rom. 13:4).

But voting for a write-in candidate or third-party candidate will not fulfill that stewardship because it will have no effect whatsoever on the outcome of this election. It has the same impact on the outcome as staying home and not voting. Therefore I consider it to be a misuse of our stewardship. It seems to me like putting an empty envelope in the offering plate when it passes you in church—it is going through the motions but accomplishing nothing. Another illustration that comes to mind is hiding your talent in the ground (Matt. 25:25).

The only choice available to us is a choice between two complete packages:

Package 1: Donald Trump and his policies.

Package 2: Joe Biden and his policies.

Both choices come as whole packages, and they are the only choices we have at the present time. Consider this teaching from Proverbs: “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it” (Prov. 3:27).

Conclusion

If you believe that God is calling you to teach about some political issues, you also have an opportunity to model how Christians can respect each other even when we have political differences. You can model a respectful and thoughtful tone. You might even consider giving opportunity for a responsible spokesman to express views different from yours. And it's up to you whether you mention the Democratic and Republican parties by name, or whether you speak in general about “Party A” and “Party B,” or whether you just speak purely about issues without mentioning any political party.

How many issues should you speak about? I cannot decide that for you. But I don't think the answer is zero. {eoa}

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