

Preach Jesus, not Your Presidential Candidate

While political pundits do their jobs in analyzing the presidential debate, I'll do my job as a spiritual leader and encourage us to keep our priorities straight. In short, as I posted earlier this year, preach Jesus and vote for your presidential candidate of choice, based on scriptural principles. But do not preach your candidate. To do so is to defile your witness.

All too often, we become better known for the candidate we support than the Lord we serve, declaring our allegiance to a party or a person far more passionately than we declare our allegiance to the Savior. And to what end? For what purpose?

Better that we keep our priorities straight and our focus clear, being careful not to allow anything to taint our testimony for our Lord. And then, as responsible citizens, we get involved in the political process.

For all of us, this should mean informed voting. For some, it will also mean donating to candidates. Or raising awareness about issues. Or working to get out the vote. Or even running for office. Let everyone find their place.

But let none of us get so caught up with the elections that we allow our social media pages or spheres of influence to become partisan political cesspools, filled with ugly attacks, mocking memes and nasty rhetoric. And all this side by side with our favorite Scripture of the day!

As Jacob (James) said, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My

brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water” (James 3:9–12, NIV).

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Surely, when our whole nation is shaking and uncertainty rules the day, we can step higher and do better and shine like lights in dark places—all while staying politically active.

Put another way, whether America recognizes it or not, our nation desperately needs the church to be the church, to proclaim our faith, live out our faith and offer the hope of the gospel, the most powerful force on earth to transform hearts and lives. Let us, then, prioritize our role as followers of the Lord.

In that light, here are some dangerous tendencies to avoid:

- We wrap the gospel in the American flag (or any national or state flag).
- We equate our country with the kingdom of God.
- We confuse patriotism with spirituality.
- We compromise our ethics to keep our party (or leader) in power.
- Our church/denomination/ministry becomes an appendage of a political party.
- We put more trust in earthly methods than in spiritual methods.
- We marry the cause of Christ to the cause of a political party (or leader) as if they were one and the same.
- We become as vulgar and rude as the candidates we follow.

- We look to the White House or any branch of government in any nation more than to God.
- We make a human being into a political savior.
- We equate loyalty to God (which should be unconditional) with loyalty to a party or political leader (which should be conditional).
- Our prayers and our prophecies become politically partisan.

Unfortunately, we tend to go to one extreme or the other.

Some Jesus-followers drop out of politics entirely, thinking, “The whole system is corrupt,” or “Why bother?” or “This world is not our home.”

Others become so obsessed with politics that they raise up political leaders as savior figures, find their primary identity in a political party and look to politics to do what only the gospel can do.

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The fact is that politics does matter, affecting the lives of millions of people. Politics affects laws that are passed. And our standard of living. And health care. And our national security. And our international standing. Politics affects our everyday life.

Political leaders, especially our presidents, can do much harm or much good, and if we fail to vote, we deserve whatever we get. Yet, quite tragically, tens of millions of American Christians do not vote at all. This must change.

But by all means, let us keep our heads and guard our hearts, not degenerating into the political madness of the hour, not becoming as carnal as some of our political leaders often

become, and not becoming evangelists for our candidate rather than evangelists for our Lord.

What America needs more than anything is for followers of Jesus to live as followers of Jesus.

That will change our nation more than any election possibly could.

So let's vote. And let's shine.

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Dr. Michael Brown () is the host of the nationally syndicated *The Line of Fire* radio show. He is the author of over 40 books, including "Can You be Gay and Christian?"; "Our Hands are Stained with Blood"; and "Seizing the Moment: How to Fuel the Fires of Revival." You can connect with him on Facebook, X or YouTube.