

What's at Stake in 2020 for Christians?

When I first interviewed then-presidential candidate Donald Trump in 2016, he made clear there was a lot at stake, and I believe the same is true four years later. One of the biggest issues to born-again Christians is preserving the religious liberty we have always taken for granted. So I asked him how he would respect religious liberty at a time evangelicals and Catholics have felt under attack for their pro-life convictions and biblical views on marriage.

Trump told me:

Religious liberty is the foundation. Without religious liberty you don't have liberty. I feel that so strongly, and so many other people do, and plenty of politicians do, but they don't express it. Religious liberty is something that I cherish, and you will never be disappointed.

I also asked him about his support of repealing the Johnson Amendment so churches and ministries would not have their free speech muzzled by the government. In 2016 he told me:

How did this happen in the first place? It's shocking how they were able to take it away. So this is not something that was written from the beginning. This was something written by a strong politician; that's all it is. It silences people we want to hear. They are afraid to talk about it because they could lose everything. [I will] lobby very strongly to have this terminated. ... I have absolute confidence that I'll be able to get it done.

Along those lines I wanted to know if he agreed that our nation was founded on Judeo-Christian values and principles. He said:

I think it was. When I look at football coaches who were fired because they held a prayer on the field, it's absolutely terrible. I think it is terrible to see so many things happening that are different from what our country used to be. So our religion is a very important part of me, and I also think it's a very important part of the country.

He later said this during his 2019 UN address on religious liberty:

The United States is founded on the principle that our rights do not come from government; they come from God. This immortal truth is proclaimed in our Declaration of Independence and enshrined in the First Amendment to our Constitution's Bill of Rights. Our Founders understood that no right is more fundamental to a peaceful, prosperous and virtuous society than the right to follow one's religious convictions.

A huge issue to Christians is our attitude toward Israel and how we deal with the threats in the Middle East. When I interviewed him in 2016, Trump promised Israel would always be a priority in his administration.

Well, for one thing, I support Israel. I don't think Obama supports Israel. I think he's the worst thing that's ever happened to Israel. The Iran deal is a disaster for Israel, and I'm very supportive of Israel and have tremendous relationships in Israel and have a son-in-law who's Jewish, married to my daughter. I will be very strongly in favor of Israel.

Trump had said the rough-and-tumble campaign and his connecting with evangelicals had an effect on him, so I asked how the whole political process had changed him spiritually.

Well, I can tell you I've always been spiritual, but I really appreciate the evangelicals because they really support me. When somebody supports you, you feel pretty good about it. ... So I think the fact that I had the tremendous support from the

evangelicals meant a lot to me and will mean a lot to me in the future.

In my interview I asked a question every Christian believes is important: Does he feel the president needs God's wisdom and guidance, and to whom does he reach out for spiritual counsel?

I have many friends within the community. One of them who's been so incredible is Franklin Graham—he's been amazing, really terrific. So we're close to Franklin. Pastor [Robert] Jeffress has been terrific. Paula White [Cain] has been incredible. So many, so many.

I really like to stay with people who have been loyal because they were here at the beginning when this was [a] very, very little, tiny flame, and they were here when everyone else was saying, "Well, you can't beat 17 [Republican candidates]."

After my interview, I understood that Donald Trump believes America remains a great country even though we've drifted away from the clear vision of the Founders. I saw that he possesses an undeniable faith in America, and I realized a big reason for that is his lifelong faith in God. His first term proved my initial impression to be true.

Learn more in Stephen Strang's new book, God, Trump, and the 2020 Election.