

RESPONDING TO THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN AMERICA

It has certainly been a tense election cycle across America, and the next few weeks and months may also prove to be intense as well. Politics certainly remains a hot topic among many Americans. I have been asked variations of this question regarding politics over the past weeks: “As Christians with political opinions and in some instances a voice, what do we do?” I have really thought and prayed over this and so I’d like to offer a word or two based on what I have learned from some other pastors and counselors.

FIRST, LET’S KEEP OUR HEADS UP HIGH

We should be encouraged by Paul’s words:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory (Col. 3:1-4).

Paul encourages us in this text to keep our eyes on the things above. He seeks to keep our focus on heaven, eternity, and ultimately Christ. A common temptation for all Christians is to lose focus. For a season, almost anything can capture our attention. Here is a simple illustration:

Although all of us would agree our attention should solely be on the road ahead, as we drive down the road, many things capture our attention. Possibly it is a deer in a field, a strange or beautiful house, a tree, a building, a person, a text, a phone call, or whatever—literally, just about anything can draw our attention away from the road for a brief moment. When that happens, we place ourselves and those around us in a dangerous position. I know I have looked back to the road in front of me after something caught my attention off to the side, and I immediately had to slam on my breaks to avoid a dangerous collision. Why? Because for an instant, I lost focus. Gratefully, Jodi nearly always sees them first and warns me!

The Apostle Paul knows that as followers of Christ, the same kind of thing can happen to any one of us. We can be distracted and focus on something below, something horizontal, or something primarily in and of the world. When this happens, we place ourselves in a dangerous situation, so keep your head up!

SECOND, HOW DOES OUR FOCUS IMPACT OUR HOPE?

As we apply this passage and its principle to politics, we would be cheating our own hearts if we allow ourselves to misplace our hope in a party, a particular person, chamber, mansion, court, or the political process itself. We look too low for hope when our focus is in any or all of these places. These people are not beneath us, but the process certainly is. We are to have a higher focus. Paul wants our attention upward on Christ, Heaven, the Throne, union with and the presence of Christ are the kinds of topics, ideas, themes, and realities that should capture our attention. When we place our focus on these spiritual realities, our hearts receive encouragement and hope.

To use another simple illustration, when life seems unsure and scary as a child, typically, the child begins to call out for a parent. Think about taking a small child to the doctor’s office for a checkup. As long as the parent is close in proximity and keeps the child’s attention, the effect of something that could unsettle the child lessens. Why?

Because the parent captures the child's attention. The child knows the parent's intentions, trusts the parent, and ultimately is comforted by the parent.

Are we as Christians concerned about many other things in the world around us? Of course, we are. However, we should consider these things and handle them wisely while keeping our focus and hope upward on Christ, as Paul commands.

SO HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS?

Should we, as followers of Christ, be concerned and participate in the political process? Absolutely. As citizens, we have a stewardship of the common grace God grants to us in every aspect of life. As God provides us blessings of any kind by His grace—and for Christians in America, citizenship in this country is a blessing of common grace to us—we respond as stewards. We either choose to be more responsible with the grace God provides, or we choose to be less responsible. Again, this is true in every aspect of living. In the United States, part of the Christian's common grace is citizenship in a country with processes through which citizens have a voice, influence, and participate in aspects of governance.

Therefore, followers of Christ participate compelled by two burdens: a ***civil responsibility*** (as a citizen of the United States) and a ***spiritual responsibility*** (as a recipient of common grace). The level to which any particular person participates is a matter of wisdom, discernment, and conscience.

NOW, A WORD OF CAUTION!

Let me be clear: Placing our hope in any political process, group, or person is vastly different from participating responsibly as a Christian citizen. I am a bit disturbed by some of the comments I have seen and read by Christians on social media. I am equally surprised at how quick we are to believe the media outlets. May it never be that we conflate faithful obedience and worship of Christ with hope in anything remotely political. As Christians, we must maintain focus on Christ and the things above, which produces true hope even as we participate as citizens in an open political process that welcomes the participation of individual citizens.

AS A CHRISTIAN, WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP MAINTAIN THIS BALANCE?

- Pray for God's will to be done in all aspects of human affairs, including politics.
- Participate in the political process as you deem responsible for you. Every person's answer here will somewhat be different based upon preferences, discernment, wisdom, and opportunity. This is an issue of stewardship.
- Keep your focus attuned to things above, not things below. Keep Christ the object of your true hope and worship. Rejoice in Christ, your heavenly home, the sovereignty of God, and the faithfulness of your God.
- Ultimately, you must prayerfully decide how to participate in the political process in a manner that honors God.

Hope that this is helpful and encouraging!