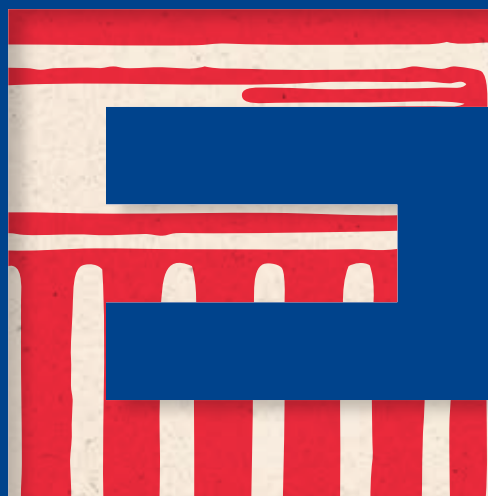
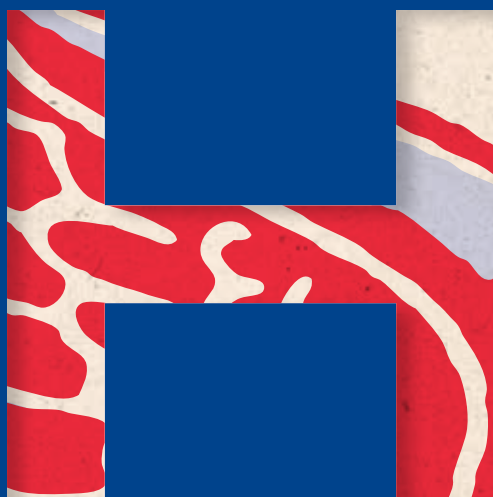


# LIGHT



Summer 2024  
Volume 10, Issue 1

SERVING SOUTHERN BAPTISTS



BRINGING HOPE *to an* ELECTION YEAR

EH  
EH



HELPING SOUTHERN BAPTISTS  
THINK BIBLICALLY ABOUT  
TODAY'S CULTURAL ISSUES

# THE ERLC PODCAST

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# A Nation in Need of Hope

As we all know, we are in the midst of a polarized moment in our nation. While the public square has always been a boisterous place dedicated to the exchange of ideas and values, thoughtful discourse and debate, and a genuine curiosity of others' different beliefs and traditions, today, it is much more akin to a battleground transforming neighbors into combatants.

Throughout generations, the public square has manifested itself at the dining room table, the ballpark, the office, the classroom, the department store, or wherever people might interact with each other. Sadly, these places have not escaped the unyielding tensions of our times. Instead of trading ideas, we trade insults. Bad-faith actors boost ratings, gain followers, sow grievance, and produce an artificial sense of reality—all for the goal of self-gain. We feel this everywhere.

Thankfully, our participatory system was set up with a feature that serves as a natural outlet to register our wishes, concerns, anxieties, and fears: elections. Elections serve as a microphone for every voter. The voting booth is a place where a voter makes their convictions and values known. Sadly, even elections have become warped in terms of their ability to meet expectations set by candidates overpromising and operating recklessly, using apocalyptic terms to describe the next election.

So how are voters to approach the election season and the wild debates that invade our homes?

We don't need more commentary, more debate, or more personality. What is missing in all this is something that gave our young and optimistic nation fuel and zeal. Something that kept previous generations going in the midst of war, depression, epidemic, racism, slavery, or scandal. Something that is vital for survival, yet painfully underestimated.

Hope.

Our nation needs hope again. It craves it. Not just some artificial or material hope that comes through an ad campaign or social media post. This hope cannot come from economic data or medical research or an elected official. True hope for our world is eternal and can only be found in one source: Jesus.

Christians play a vital role in an election year. As God's people, we have been commissioned to be salt and light, and an election year provides Christians an opportunity to be a city on a hill, demonstrating that our citizenship is not of Earth but of a Kingdom far greater.

This issue of *Light* magazine seeks to help Christians think biblically about how we proclaim that eternal hope in an election year, not for our renown or the advancement of our own agenda, but for the glory of God.



*True hope for our  
world is eternal  
and can only  
be found in one  
source: Jesus.*

*Federick Brent Leatherwood*

F. BRENT LEATHERWOOD  
PRESIDENT, ERLC

22



## COMMENTARY

**10 Holding Leaders to a Higher Standard**  
ALLISON CANTRELL  
Words matter. Allison Cantrell explains presidential rhetoric, how it shapes elections, and the need to hold candidates accountable.

**12 How Does Our Nation Elect Its Leaders?**  
How does our nation elect its leaders? This article breaks down the brilliant, yet often confusing process.

**16 The Big Sort**  
TONY WOLFE, TERRY DORSETT, AND LEO ENDEL  
Context will determine our political interactions with others. Three Southern Baptist leaders shed light on what they've learned in their communities.

## SPOTLIGHT

**22 Election Triage**  
HUNTER BAKER  
Politics can be divisive and ugly. But Hunter Baker shows us how a Christian's faith should inform a better way of thinking about politics.

**28 No Perfect Party**  
SHANNON ROYCE, JUSTIN GIBONEY, MATTHEW T. MARTENS, AND BROOKE MEDINA  
Can genuine believers make different voting decisions? Four Christians share their opinions to foster civil conversation.

**38 What is a Pastor's Role in Politics?**  
LINDSAY NICOLET, JON C. NELSON, ERIC COSTANZO, AND DANIEL DARLING  
What is a pastor's role in politics? Three Southern Baptists with pastoral experience answer this question.

**44 Pursuing Good**  
JASON THACKER, MATTHEW T. MARTENS, HANNAH DANIEL, CHELSEA SOBOLIK, AND PAUL D. MILLER  
Policy proposals can be confusing. So, what should we look for in good policy? Five experts give insight.

# LIGHT

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## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

09 **From the Editor**

54 **Resources**



On the cover, designer Jacob Blaze illustrates a resolute hope for our nation by looking forward while simultaneously appealing to the history of our country, pointing to our Founders' better ideals.



THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS  
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OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION



# ENGAGE WITH HOPE THIS ELECTION YEAR

Elections can cause Christians to be anxious and worry about the future. Some believers are excited to vote for a candidate they strongly support. Others feel politically orphaned and are unsure how to vote in a way that aligns with their Christian commitments.

“The Nations Belong to God: A Christian Guide for Political Engagement” is a starting point for Christians to think about how to engage the political processes around them, not just this year, but also in the years to come.



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# A Different Way to Engage

It's probably not a stretch to say that few people get excited about a presidential election year in America. It's not because they aren't grateful for the privilege of voting or that they don't desire positive changes for our country. It's because, in recent years, these elections are marked by deep division, hateful rhetoric, and self-aggrandizement. It gets exhausting.

So, it's no surprise that even well-meaning Christians get caught up in the fray. Some withdraw from political engagement, feeling as if their voices couldn't possibly be loud enough to make a difference. Others give in to the temptation to vilify those with whom they disagree. Neither is the most constructive way to use whatever measure of influence the Lord has given us to seek the welfare of our earthly home.

As Christians, the way for us to engage is with the hope of Jesus Christ.

"Bringing Hope to an Election Year" is the ERLC's contribution to navigating the potential chaos of an election year with you. Together, we want to enter into the public square with conviction and compassion. The articles in this issue of *Light* magazine will remind us to exercise charity toward those with different opinions, help pastors think about their role in politics, and give us key points to consider when analyzing policy issues that Southern Baptists care about.

The "how" of our Christian political engagement will depend on the callings, vocations, and opportunities the Lord puts before us. Pastors, for example, focus on proclaiming the gospel and discipling their church members to be salt and light in their communities. Parents of young children might use their talents to speak into the local school board and attend city council meetings. And business professionals may utilize their influence and resources to support candidates and encourage needed changes.

Regardless of the way we interact in politics, the point is that we engage—with hope. At the end of the day, Christians know that the weight of our confidence shouldn't rest on a political party, candidate, policy proposal, or country. We are awaiting a better country and the One who is the ruler of kings on Earth (Heb. 11:16; Rev. 1:5). As we wait for that day, let's serve as ambassadors of our God, bringing renewal, restoration, and the hope of the gospel to our nation.

*Lindsay Nicolet*

LINDSAY NICOLET

MANAGING EDITOR, *LIGHT* MAGAZINE



*As Christians,  
the way for us  
to engage is  
with the hope  
of Jesus Christ.*



# Holding Leaders to a Higher Standard

## 4 CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC

*Allison Cantrell*

Historically, noteworthy presidential rhetoric has often been in response to extenuating circumstances. President Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” given during the deadly Civil War, is one of the most quoted speeches given by an American president in our nation’s history, remembered in its entirety. And following 9/11, President George W. Bush asserted, “Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.”

Presidential rhetoric can also serve to summarize a key political position. One of

President Ronald Reagan’s most quoted statements comes from a press conference in 1986 where he declared, “... the nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I’m from the Government, and I’m here to help.” By including this line, Reagan expertly pointed to a large part of his platform: deregulation and lowered government spending.

Similarly, President John F. Kennedy is quoted from his inaugural address in which he proclaimed, “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” This rallying cry for self-sacrifice tied in to Kennedy’s *New Frontier* platform, which emphasized a federal space program and the eradication

of poverty through the expansion of federal programs.

### SHIFTING PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC

Over the past few decades, though, presidential rhetoric has shifted from a reflection of local and national discourse and of party platforms to an individualistic exercise. Instead of vying for voter support, candidates compete for air time with viral messaging on news programming and social media. Our expectations for presidential rhetoric are increasingly substandard; we accept less cohesive statements and more short, snappy sound bites easily taken out of context and easier still to digest.

We see this reflected through new norms, where it's common for legislators and officials to post policy positions on X, create memes designed solely to go viral, stir up conflict in committee meetings to gain notoriety for an upcoming reelection campaign, and repeatedly apply labels to the "other side." This rhetoric rejoices not in persuading undecided voters or being accountable for the treatment of our fellow man but delights in criticizing someone who is both unlike and unlikable to us.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC

As Christians, we hold that our words carry weight as more than just a messaging tool. They function like a rudder of a ship or a bit in a horse's mouth, leading the person who speaks them and forging a path for constituents to follow (James 3). This raises an important question: what is considered good presidential rhetoric?

### Good presidential rhetoric is forgettable.

It does not seek acclaim or applause. It does not issue a rallying cry where it is unwarranted or seek to encourage impassioned devotion toward the president himself. Simply put, good presidential rhetoric is merely focused on the undistinguished, day-to-day act of responsible governance.

### Good presidential rhetoric unifies.

It positions the United States as a nation of *we*—where our identity is not found in our political party, but in our citizenship. Healthy presidential rhetoric knows that our elected officials represent and serve all constituents, including those that voted in opposition, and is willing to disagree with constituents in order to seek their best interest.

### Good presidential rhetoric holds constituents to a higher standard.

A common attitude in politics today is that individual voters are smart, but

collective voters are unintelligent or uninformed. While this is usually stated in response to illogical voting patterns, what this phrase actually does is treat constituents as infants to be guided and manipulated. In reality, voters should be compelled to rise to the standard of informed voting as capable adults who are able to digest policies and political realities. Good rhetoric responds by presenting voters with digestible and accurately represented policy platforms.

word and speech? Or will we find temporary satisfaction in words without restraint?

The political reality remains that presidential candidates are increasingly incentivized against meeting these standards because voters and donors alike often turn out for radicalizing language, whether or not it is true. And yet, we know that negativity is not necessarily realism, and hope is not naive. We, as voters, incentivize them to behave this way. If we can change our expectations

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*Both as believers and as Americans, we must strive to hold on to a biblical vision of beauty in governance.*

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**Good presidential rhetoric does not hold a presidential candidate before constituents as a salvific figure to be beheld, but as an official to be elected.**

A wise candidate will not claim a nation's future hinges upon his or her election to public office. Similarly, as Christians, we know our only Savior is found in Christ, and any elected official will inevitably fail us. However, this reality does not recuse us from our moral obligation to think deeply about our nation and its leaders. The hard, meaningful work for believers is found in the in-between—not just in how we vote, but in the process leading up to and following political engagement.

## WHAT WILL WE CHOOSE?

So, will we be people who value rhetoric held to a high standard? Will we have the courage to seek kindness and conviction in

of elected officials, we are not resigned indefinitely to candidates whose speech is harmful, whether this is glorifying the murder of a preborn child through abortion or intentionally lashing out against that child's mother.

Both as believers and as Americans, we must strive to hold on to a biblical vision of beauty in governance. We should seek leaders whose rhetoric brings order where there is chaos in both word and deed. This, in turn, seeks the good of neighbor over the good of self and enables us to cling to the redemptive truth of the gospel, both for ourselves and for the officials we vote for in the ballot box. The very truth of the gospel that we proclaim in our own speech compels us to do so. ★

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Allison Cantrell serves as senior policy associate in the ERLC's Washington, D.C., office.

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# How Does Our Nation Elect Its Leaders?

## DEMYSTIFYING THE FEDERAL ELECTORAL PROCESS

*ERLC Staff*

**A**s the 2024 elections approach, voters will once again cast ballots for the president and vice president, all 435 members of the House of Representatives, and 34 United States senators. But while these are all federal offices, the process for choosing a president is quite different than for selecting legislators. Understanding these two distinct election systems provides a window into the careful balance the Founding Fathers struck between federalism and popular sovereignty.

During the establishment of the American

Republic, the Founders grappled with a pivotal question: how should a nation elect its leaders? This question was more than a mere logistical concern; it was imbued with deep philosophical and ethical implications. The solutions they proposed and enacted have left an indelible mark, shaping the nation's electoral processes to this day.

At the heart of American democracy lies a unique and intricate electoral system, a blend of direct and indirect democratic processes that governs how leaders are chosen in the U.S. The Electoral College, often a topic of debate and misunderstanding,

represents a balance between the popular will and federalist principles, where power is divided between a central (or federal) government and individual states. In contrast, the direct election of legislators embodies the democratic ideal of representation by the people, for the people.

### INDIRECT: THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE AND THE PRESIDENCY

When the U.S. Constitution was being drafted, a primary concern was balancing the power between large and small states and between the federal government and individual states. The Electoral College emerged as a compromise, a hybrid mechanism blending elements of direct popular vote and state-centric representation. It was also a reflection of the era's skepticism toward direct democracy, which the Founders feared could lead to mob rule and the tyranny of the majority.

This system ensured that each state had a voice in presidential elections proportional to its representation in Congress, yet it also incorporated the people's will through the popular vote in each state. It's a system uniquely American, deeply rooted in the Federalist ideals that sought to balance diverse interests across a vast and varied nation.

When Americans head to the polls to vote for a presidential candidate, they are casting their ballots not directly for a presidential candidate but for the slate of electors who will represent their state in the Electoral College. This is known as the popular vote.

Each state is allocated electors equal to its total number of senators and representatives in Congress. This number varies based on the state's population. California has the most with 54 electoral votes. Five states (Alaska, Delaware, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming) and the District of Columbia are tied for the least, with three each.

Based on the popular vote, each state (except Nebraska and Maine, which have a proportional system) follows a "winner-takes-all" approach, where the candidate

who wins the majority of the popular vote in the state wins all of that state's electoral votes. This indirect election process means that a candidate can win the presidency while losing the national popular vote, which has occurred five times in U.S. history—most recently in 2000 and 2016. It happens when a candidate racks up narrow victories in several high-population states while losing by wider margins in the rest of the country.

In December, after the general election, the chosen electors, typically loyal party members selected by state party committees, meet in their respective state capitals

a majority, the decision goes to the House of Representatives, with each state delegation having one vote to determine the president, while the Senate elects the vice president.

This process is defined by the U.S. Constitution and further refined by federal and state laws. One major change in the process occurred in December 2022. At that time, Congress passed the Electoral Count Reform Act to overhaul the 1887 Electoral Count Act, which governs the process of appointing presidential electors and counting their votes. Under this act, if the number of electoral votes cast is reduced, such as in cases where Congress

of representation by and for the people, though within a carefully crafted constitutional framework.

The House of Representatives, often referred to as “the people’s house,” is the most directly responsive to the American electorate. Members of the House are elected every two years, ensuring they remain closely attuned to the shifting sentiments of their constituents. Each representative serves a specific congressional district, and their number in the House is determined by the population of each state, providing a proportionate representation of the diverse demography of the nation.

This process, however, is not without its complexities. Redistricting—the act of redrawing district boundaries, usually every 10 years following the census—has significant political implications. Gerrymandering, the manipulation of these boundaries for partisan advantage, is a critical issue that shapes the House’s composition and, by extension, the legislative agenda.

Initially, U.S. senators were not elected directly by the people but were chosen by state legislatures. This approach reflected the Founders’ desire to insulate the Senate from the swings of public opinion, ensuring that it would act as a stabilizing force in government, representing the states’ interests. However, as the call for more democratic representation grew, the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment, ratified in 1913, marked a significant shift, mandating the direct election of senators. This change brought the Senate closer to the people, aligning it more closely with the democratic ethos that increasingly defined the American political landscape.

Senators serve six-year terms, with elections staggered so that approximately one-third of the Senate is up for election every two years. This design ensures that the Senate, unlike the House, isn’t completely overhauled in any single election, maintaining a level of continuity and stability in the legislative process.

Senators represent their entire state, a role that inherently comes with broader

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## *Direct elections of legislators has become a key pillar of American democracy.*

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after the election to cast the official ballots for president. In most states, these electors are pledged to vote for whichever candidate won the popular vote in that state, though there have been rare instances of “faithless electors” breaking that pledge. The electors cast a vote for president and one for vice president. These votes are then sent to the president of the Senate (the current vice president of the U.S.).

Additionally, the ceremonial role of Congress in counting and certifying these votes is a crucial final step, highlighted in historical instances such as the 2000 and 2016 elections. In a joint session of Congress in January, the electoral votes are counted. The president of the Senate presides over the session and announces the results.

To win the presidency, a candidate must receive a majority of electoral votes. Currently, this means at least 270 out of 538 total electoral votes. If no candidate receives

votes to not count a slate of electors, the number of votes needed to win also decreases. For example, if Congress discards 30 electoral votes, the total number of votes cast drops to 508, and the number of votes needed to win drops to 245. This reduces the incentive for supporters of a losing candidate within Congress to try to throw out electoral votes so that they can select the president.

### **DIRECT: ELECTIONS FOR LEGISLATORS**

In the realm of legislative elections, the U.S. embraces a more straightforward and directly democratic approach compared to the more indirect Electoral College. Legislative races use a first-past-the-post system in single-member districts, meaning the candidate with the most votes wins even if they fall short of a majority.

The election of senators and representatives reflects the core democratic principle

# GLOSSARY

**Absentee Ballot:**

A voting method allowing a person to mail in their vote instead of voting in person at a polling place, often used by those unable to physically be present on Election Day.

**Battleground State:**

A state where the electoral outcome is uncertain and both major political parties have a strong chance of winning. These states are often the focus of campaign efforts.

**Blue State/Red State:**

Terms used to denote states that predominantly vote for the Democratic Party (Blue) or the Republican Party (Red).

**Canvassing:**

The act of soliciting votes or gathering information about voters' opinions, typically conducted by going door-to-door or through phone calls.

**Exit Poll:**

A survey taken immediately after voters have exited the polling stations. It aims to predict the outcome of an election before the official count is available.

**Gerrymandering:**

The practice of manipulating the boundaries of electoral constituencies to favor one party or class, often resulting in oddly shaped districts.

**Jungle Primary:**

A primary election where all candidates for elected office run in the same primary regardless of political party. Also known as a “nonpartisan blanket primary.”

**Landslide:**

An election in which the victorious candidate or party wins by an overwhelming margin.

**Political Action Committee (PAC):**

An organization that raises money privately to influence elections or legislation, especially at the federal level.

**Referendum:**

A direct vote by the electorate on a particular proposal or issue, which could be a law, policy decision, or constitutional amendment.

**Robocall:**

An automated telephone call that delivers a recorded message, used by political campaigns and telemarketers.

**Spoiler Effect:**

The impact a minor party candidate can have on an election by taking votes away from a major candidate with similar ideologies, potentially causing a rival candidate to win.

**Stump Speech:**

A standard speech used by a political candidate during a campaign, often repeating core messages and themes.

**Super PAC (Super Political Action Committee):**

A type of independent political action committee which may raise unlimited sums of money from corporations, unions, and individuals but is not permitted to contribute directly to parties or candidates.

**Swing State:**

A state in which no single candidate or party has overwhelming support in securing that state's electoral college votes, making it a target for heavy campaigning.

**Voter Suppression:**

Any legal or extralegal measures or strategies used to prevent eligible voters from exercising their right to vote.

**Whistlestop:**

A political campaign strategy in which the candidate makes a series of brief appearances or speeches at a number of small towns over a short period of time.

responsibilities and a wider array of interests to consider. This statewide representation contrasts with the more localized focus of House members, creating a dynamic interplay between local and statewide priorities within Congress.

Elections for the House and the Senate are integral to the balance of power in the U.S. government. Midterm elections, occurring halfway through a president's term, can dramatically shift this balance, often serving as a referendum on the sitting president's performance. The outcomes of these elections shape legislative priorities, influence policymaking, and can either bolster or challenge the president's agenda.

Before the general election, candidates for Congress must first navigate the primary (or caucus) process within their party. These primaries and caucuses determine who will represent the party in the general election. They vary significantly between states and between parties, with some opting for closed primaries (where only registered party members can vote) and others for open primaries (where any registered voter can participate).

Direct elections of legislators has become a key pillar of American democracy,

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*As participants in this system, we have a singular duty as Christians to not only understand these processes but to engage with them in a way that represents our faith commitments.*

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ensuring that the voice of the people is heard and represented in the legislative process. While the system is not without its challenges, it remains a vital mechanism for the expression of the democratic will and for holding elected officials accountable to those they serve.

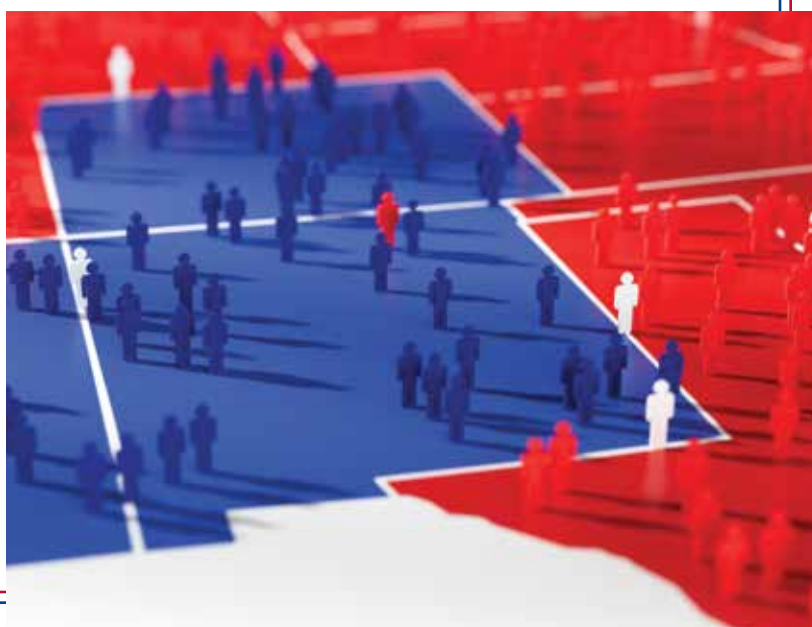
#### **TWO APPROACHES, ONE DUTY**

Understanding the intricacies of the U.S. electoral system can be helpful in understanding the approaches

taken by politicians. For instance, both systems profoundly shape political campaign strategies. Presidential candidates tailor their campaigns to the Electoral College map, focusing on swing states. In contrast, congressional candidates concentrate on local and state issues relevant to their direct electorate. This difference in focus can lead to varied governance styles and priorities, influencing national policy outcomes.

Ultimately, the indirect method of the Electoral College and the direct election of legislators each play a vital role in ensuring diverse regional and popular interests are represented in the American government.

As participants in this system, we have a singular duty as Christians to not only understand these processes but to engage with them in a way that represents our faith commitments. The biblical principles of stewardship and justice, for example, call us to be informed and moral citizens, recognizing that our involvement in the electoral process is an expression of our commitment to the community and the greater good. Whether voting for a local representative or indirectly for a president, each ballot cast is a profound exercise of our rights, our responsibilities, and our vision for America. ★



# The Big Sort

## MINISTERING IN A POLITICALLY DIVIDED COUNTRY

America is politically and culturally divided, and the evidence is seen in the disappearance of purple states and the emergence of clearly defined red and blue regions of the country. This creates unique challenges in each state, especially for Christians seeking wisdom in political engagement. For example, a discussion with your neighbor in Alabama about pro-life issues will be different than a similar conversation between co-workers in New York. As believers, it's beneficial to understand our particular location and the different contexts where our brothers and sisters in Christ are living out the gospel. To help us, we've asked Baptist leaders in Democratic, Republican, and swing states to share what's been valuable to them as they've sought to build bridges and esteem the gospel while engaging in the public square. May their experiences encourage you as you seek to be a source of hope in troubled times.





RED

# Placing Our Hope in Christ Alone

Tony Wolfe

**T**he two dates etched into the fruits of the palmetto tree on our state seal are March 26 and July 4. On the former, in 1776, the Palmetto State declared independence from Great Britain. On the latter, we locked arms with the other 12 colonies for the same cause. Some of the most consequential battles of the Revolutionary War were fought on our soil. In many ways, the South Carolina revolutionary spirit ignited and unified an entire nation.

Eighty-four years later, our soil tasted the blood of many again. But this time, South Carolina's actions divided the states instead of unifying them in December of 1860. South Carolina voted to leave the

Union because of the election of Abraham Lincoln, who vowed to end the expansion of slavery. The Civil War, in which 620,000 Americans died, sprouted first from the soil of the state I love and call my home.

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*Hope is a resilient thing. But hope of any sort is a wasted breath if not perched upon eternal truth.*

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## A POLITICALLY CONSERVATIVE PEOPLE

South Carolinians are a bold and proud people. They are also a very political people.

It is not uncommon for me to run into one of our legislators at an associational gathering or a South Carolina Baptist Convention event. At least one pastor in our Convention is also a state representative. Many more are active members in Baptist churches across the state. I have enjoyed private meetings with the governor, the speaker, and party majority leaders. I processed in full academic regalia with U.S. Sen. Tim Scott who spoke at the inauguration of Keith Faulkner, fourth president of SCBaptists' Charleston Southern University (of which Scott is a distinguished alumnus).

South Carolina is not only a proud and political state, it is also a deeply red state. My first month on the job saw three meetings at the State House with the governor, legislators, and various lobbyist groups. After the South Carolina Supreme Court struck down the 2022 legislature's fetal heartbeat bill which prohibited abortion after a fetal heartbeat could be detected, my staff and I worked with legislators into the last hours of the 2023 session to get a revised version of the bill introduced and on the floor for a vote, which is currently in effect.

So far in 2024, thanks to the work of our Convention's Christian Life and Public Affairs Committee, we have seen sweeping conservative legislative wins in the State House, some of which began on the floor of our state Convention by way of resolution.

But 2024 is a presidential election year, and these years stir the political waters more tumultuously. Republican candidates have carried the majority of

South Carolina voters in every presidential election since 1980. The last Republican presidential candidate to receive less than a 54% majority in South Carolina was

Bob Dole in 1996. I believe South Carolinians are past the outright national insurrection and rebellion they knew in the 1860s, but it is obvious that our loamy soil still tastes the blood of our fiery political spirit.

### GOVERNMENT IS NOT OUR HOPE

Our state motto begins with *Animis opibusque parati*, or “Prepared in mind and resources.” For many South Carolina Baptists, the most difficult work in public policy engagement is to remind ourselves that while we enjoy an economically and socially conservative polity, our government is not our hope. We think and plan ahead. We talk things out and work things through. But careful is the road and deliberative the mind that takes every thought captive and makes it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). If our minds are prepared for anything, they must first be prepared to confront our own hearts, for while the mind thinks, the heart hopes.

The other part of our state motto declares, *Dum spiro spero*, or “While I breathe, I hope.” Hope is a resilient thing. But hope of any sort is a wasted breath if not perched upon eternal truth. Every South Carolinian claims *dum spiro spero*, but those who bear the name of Christ must anchor that hope in Christ alone. To set our hope upon our boldness, our pride, or our redness is futility. We are citizens of another Kingdom, subjects of an eternal Sovereign. Through the gales of political persuasion and policy engagement, it must be true in South Carolina and all over this great nation that among the people of God, *dum spiro spero en Christo salvatore et rex solum* (“in Christ, Savior and King alone”). ★

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**Tony Wolfe** is the executive director-treasurer of SCBaptist.

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### BLUE

# A Focus on Proclaiming the Gospel Alone

*Terry Dorsett*

I moved to New England in 1993. I grew up in a conservative Christian family in the Midwest and always identified with the more conservative political perspectives in our nation. I remember my pastor once standing in the pulpit and saying, “I can’t tell you how to vote but I secured a blank copy of the upcoming ballot, and it is hanging on my office door already marked with the way I’m going to vote. You can all look at it after the service.”

My parents never failed to check his office door before casting their own vote, and it was always for the most conservative candidates on the ballot. Until moving to New England, I had never known a Christian who didn’t hold a conservative political perspective on pretty much every subject.

### A COMMON FOUNDATION

I moved to Vermont, one of the most liberal New England states, to serve as a pastor/church planter with the North American Mission Board. Shortly after, I

remember having a conversation about a particular political issue with one of my deacons. Without question, he was a godly man who loved the Lord. He consistently looked for ways to apply the gospel to his daily life. It surprised me when he took an opposite opinion than I did on that political opinion. I had never known a committed Christian, especially one in leadership at a solidly evangelical church, who held his political position.

From my perspective, this deacon’s political opinion was the first step toward a slippery slope where the gospel would be lost. From his perspective, my political opinion lacked compassion, and therefore, had already abandoned the gospel. We had a vigorous discussion about the issue one Wednesday after prayer meeting. We did not persuade each other to change our positions.

While we disagreed on that particular position, and many others during the eight years I was his pastor, what we both loved

was the gospel. We were both determined to apply the gospel to our lives and committed to doing so with more than mere words, but with practical, daily actions.

As we focused on our common love of the gospel, it led to many insightful conversations. We did not always find common political ground, but we did often find common gospel ground. We accomplished a lot of gospel work together during those years and remain friends three decades later.

### FOCUSING ON THE GOSPEL

From this relationship, I realized that it was a mistake to assume that just because a person was an evangelical Christian they would hold to a particular political opinion. After 30 years in New England, that truth is more apparent than ever.

In my role as a denominational leader in New England, I have met Christians who

hold to a wide variety of political opinions. For me, living as a Christian in a politically liberal region is about learning to focus more on how to proclaim the gospel than on who wins a particular political fight. This requires me to think carefully about making political statements and focus more on making gospel statements.

The question I often ask myself is: will this statement advance the gospel or hinder the gospel? If making a statement will advance the gospel, then I make it and accept the results as the cost of carrying my cross. But if it does not, I have learned it's better to keep it to myself, following the teaching of 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12: "aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one."

Taking a more thoughtful, reflective approach and being careful to keep my public statements limited to those that are essential to the gospel has allowed me to see many of my blue-state friends find faith in Christ. While some have also come to embrace my political opinions, that has never been my goal. My goal is to focus on the gospel.

When we get to heaven, political parties won't matter, only our love for Jesus will. For me, living as a Christian in a blue state is about focusing on the gospel of Christ and making everything else secondary. Perhaps if more Christians from all political backgrounds took that approach, we might make a stronger gospel impact than we imagine. ★

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**Terry W. Dorsett** is a pastor, author, and the executive director of both the Baptist Churches of New England, Inc., and the Baptist Foundation of New England.

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## PURPLE

# Shining a Light for God's Glory

Leo Endel



I was preaching through the Sermon on the Mount when the opportunity came to write this article. Initially, I felt no inclination to enter this discussion, but something nagging inside me said that I needed to pray before saying no. Almost immediately, the Lord brought to my mind the previous week's sermon on salt and light and how it pertains to our politically polarized climate.

### SALT, LIGHT, AND GOOD WORKS

There are multiple sermons and Bible studies centered around what it means to be salt and light. Salt preserves, flavors, heals, and creates thirst. Light shines and makes it possible for us to see. But we often pass over two key details in this Matthew 5 passage.

- First, salt must maintain its purity if it is to fulfill its purpose.
- Second, the light must place itself where it can shine if it is to serve its

purpose. A city on a hill will be seen. Don't hide your light under a basket, but let it shine.

Too many Christians have understood this to mean that we engage the culture by public preaching, nagging, sign-carrying, and Facebook posting on political positions and politicians. This kind of light rarely shines; it instigates.

To be sure, there is a time for these kinds of public discourse, at least when they are rational and calmly stated. However, the typical bluster rarely changes anyone's mind. It tends to harden positions and create greater resistance. People rarely hear logic in short, pithy, powerful statements; they simply close their ears and develop their own statements.

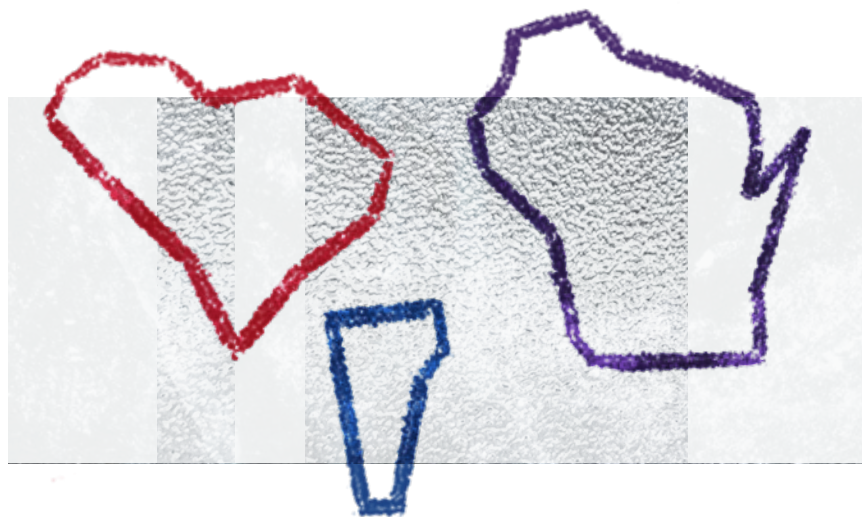
Instead, Jesus says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." It is not our powerful arguments or our political acumen that most often change others. Change is fostered when they see our good works.

### A COMMUNITY-MINDED CHURCH

Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Church ministered to the poor, addicted, and suffering of our society. Gradually over that century, the government began to be the safety net for the downtrodden. The Church slowly surrendered this ground to the government, and with this, lost the privilege of giving practical hope to hurting people. Government influence grew; Church influence declined.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, I thought we had only hampered our ability to shine the gospel into the lives of hurting people. I was wrong. We also hindered our ability to shine the gospel into the lives of the culture at large.

A parallel to Jesus' statement, "no one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket," is akin in our day to, "no one lights a lamp and puts it inside a church building." If the



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*If the Church is not involved in the community, she cannot be salt and light in the community.*

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Church is not involved in the community, she cannot be salt and light in the community. When the Church is doing the "good works" of the gospel in the community, then her light shines and gives glory to God.

In a purple state like Wisconsin and a blue state like Minnesota, I don't believe the Church can effectively be salt and light until our communities can see our good works. How do we do this? We hold to the teachings of Jesus *and* serve our communities. When they see our love for people and our willingness to sacrificially serve, our actions will love out loud, and then, in time, they might have ears to hear Jesus' words.

### OUR ULTIMATE HOPE

Our cultural decay will not be reversed by whoever is elected this November. Put the political signs in your front yard, support your candidate, and calmly share your positions on issues. But remember

that if you're the kind of guy who shouts at the kids for walking on your yard; the kind of woman who shuts the door at the high school band student selling candy bars; the kind of person who posts long, angry diatribes on Facebook, or who never volunteers to minister to those in need, then you may be doing more harm than good.

Too many people believe our cultural decay can be reversed in "the most critical election of our time." That is simply not true. My hope is not in a politician; my hope is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I will vote my biblical convictions this fall, but before I do, I will let my little light shine into the community and pray that others will see my "good works and give glory to [my] Father in heaven." ★

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*Leo Endel is the executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention*

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# PRESENT THE GOODNESS OF GOD'S DESIGN WITH COURAGE AND COMPASSION

The rate of teenagers who identify as transgender has doubled in the United States according to one estimate. And the sexual revolution has reached those in our churches. As Christians, we need to be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us (1 Pet. 3:15).

“God’s Good Design: A Practical Guide for Answering Gender Confusion” is a resource for pastors and church leaders that includes a theological framework and practical scenarios that will further the conversation in your churches about how to serve those broken by the sexual revolution with the hope of the gospel.



**SCAN TO DOWNLOAD YOUR  
FREE DIGITAL GUIDE TODAY**

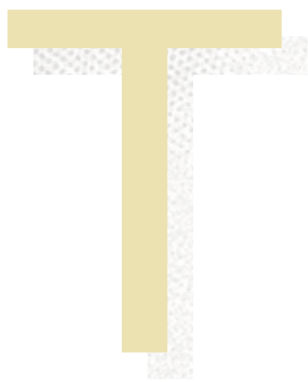


HOW CAN  
WE THINK  
BETTER

# Election Triage

ABOUT  
POLITICS AS  
CHRISTIANS?

*Hunter Baker*



The last 35 years have featured the advent of the first 24-7 news channel (CNN), the introduction of competing channels such as Fox News and MSNBC, the movement toward news with a more explicit ideological identity, the explosion of internet publishing, and then the astonishing growth of social media. Given the massive technological changes that have affected politics, it should not be surprising that

## The most significant political statement we can make is that **Jesus Christ is the King.**

it feels as though we are constantly buffeted by the waves of competing messages aiming to secure our attention, activity, and loyalty.

All of this disruption has had its impact on our church bodies. Some time ago, a woman in my local church approached me and tearfully explained how painful political conflict had been for her family and

for her Sunday school class. I am sure that many of us share her distress, which raises the question: can we think better about politics as Christians and treat one another better in the process?

### **CULTIVATING CIVIC VIRTUE**

One of the first things we can do is to remember that we are fallen, sinful creatures. That means that we have a tremendous tendency to see our own opinions and actions in the best light possible, while we look at what others are thinking and doing and judge them without charity.

For years, I have worked with an organization called Braver Angels. One of the things we do is gather “reds” and “blues” for a facilitated conversation about politics. Interestingly, we have often used a marriage and family counselor to help the two sides be fair to one another. Before the conversation begins, the “blues” assume the “reds” are racists who don’t believe in science. The “reds” think the “blues” are commie snowflakes without any common sense.

But when the two sides speak to each other in an honest way with the help of the facilitator, they tend to see things differently. They don’t come to agreement. That’s not the goal. However, they do learn more about the people on the other side and the reasons they have for their positions.

I would call this ability to stay focused on our fellow citizens as human beings like ourselves and not as cartoon supervillains a kind of civic virtue. Christians have a natural advantage in developing this virtue if they will remember what the Bible tells us about our sinful nature and about the inherent dignity and value of every person.

Back in 2020, I was struck by something that happened when I interacted with a liberal congregation at the invitation of a friend who is a liberal pastor with left-wing politics. In the name of reducing political tension, he interviewed me over Zoom (this was the COVID-19 period) in front of his church members.





I answered his questions for quite some time when one of the female audience members began to weep. She wasn't crying because she loved my answers or because she was angry.

Instead, she wept because of how much tension she'd felt before the event. She explained that she had been afraid and had expected me to be some kind of monster. Though she didn't agree with me, she did feel a sense of relief as she listened to me talking about my beliefs. The fear and tension she felt before the event shows what we are doing to each other politically. She and many others have been harmed by the irresponsibility of it.

### **HOW OUR FAITH DIRECTS OUR POLICY**

Another critical point we need to consider has to do with the degree to which our faith obviously directs our politics in terms of policy. While there are certain lines that can be drawn clearly—such as the sanctity of life and the nature of marriage—the simple fact is that most of what we deal with in politics comes down to prudence and wisdom. Accordingly, we should extend

more grace and recognize that others often have good reasons even if we don't consider them ultimately convincing.

Consider issues such as immigration, the environment, taxes, the size of government, education, and a host of others. We can debate these things at great length. Why? The answers are often not immediately obvious. Loving our neighbor matters in the context of politics, but much of loving our neighbor has to do with figuring out how we can accomplish the common good.

We won't do our best work seeing and accomplishing the common good through propaganda campaigns. I have always been a small-government, low-tax conservative, but as a person who has spent my life thinking and reading about politics and public policy, it is also clear to me that there are real and legitimate reasons and concerns driving the thinking and work of those who disagree with me.

The best thing that can happen is that we have honest conversations instead of wasting our time constantly demonizing each other and trying to gain some kind of public relations advantage.

## THE NATURE OF GOVERNMENT

There are other important considerations, too. For example, we should think harder about the essential nature of government. Several years ago, one of President Obama's political allies described government as "the things we choose to do together." Such a portrayal is altogether too flippant and casual. It completely misunderstands the kind of thing government is and the stakes that are involved.

A good social scientific description of government is that it is the institution in society which possesses a legal monopoly on the use of coercive violence. Read that sentence again, carefully. We are not talking about a game. We are talking about the most powerful social and physical force invested in the hands of men and women.

When we deal with politics, then, we should approach the subject with the greatest sobriety and a strong sense of the stakes involved. It is entirely inappropriate to treat politics and government as though these things are the stuff of college football where we cultivate silly hatreds and rivalries. Politics lies on other side of war. If we want to talk about loving our neighbor, let's think about being very careful before we apply the force of government against them.

We do need this power of government, though. Martin Luther saw it is a gift God gives us to restrain the evil men would do in the world. But again, the stakes are incredibly high. When we deal with political power, we are handling nitroglycerin. So, handle it with care.

## POLITICS ARE NOT ULTIMATE

Because of our tendency to make politics ultimate, we guard against irresponsible uses of politics by not getting too wrapped up in it. David Koyzis has pointed out that ideologies end up being idolatrous because they take something, whether it be freedom, equality, or some other value, and elevate it above our love

and faithfulness toward God.<sup>1</sup> We see it all the time in the Church among both young and old.

There are many people who become intoxicated with political personalities and causes to the extent that it is clear they are more excited about the gospel of this nationalist, that woke campaigner, or this political conspiracy theorist than they are about the gospel of Jesus Christ. The result is tremendous division within a body that should be thoroughly united in its first love.

James K.A. Smith has noted that when we become too focused on creating a better society, we can very easily lose any focus on Christian supernaturalism.<sup>2</sup> With only a little reflection, I think many of us can see that politics exerts that kind of gravity on our attention. It should be no surprise that politics often serves as a motive for those engaging in a "deconstruction" of their faith.



# Ultimately, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, but it will not be because we created and implemented the perfect political plan. It will be because of Christ's love and his undeniable status as Lord.

## THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL STATEMENT

Finally, I want to share something I've been thinking about more and more as I age. I was an unusual child in that I had a strong interest in politics early in life. I can remember Watergate and Vietnam on the television news and also watching the Ford-Carter election returns as I sat on the sofa next to my mother. The whole panorama of politics and public policy has always captured me.

So, I write this essay as much for myself as others. In doing so, I find myself reflecting on the desire of the Israelites for a king and God's response to them in 1 Samuel 8. While he does not endorse their desire for a king, he does give them what they want in their yearning to be like the other nations. But, when we look at the history of the kings of Israel and Judah in the books of Kings and Chronicles, it is not encouraging. If we were to list out the monarchs and categorize them, the great majority would be failures. Even the best, David, made a spectacularly deadly, tragic, and sinful mistake in his dealings with Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah.

It seems to me that one of the lessons we should learn as we reflect back on that sad history is that Jesus is the only king worthy of the name. Our response should be to focus more and more on him and upon God as the true source of authority

and less upon ourselves and the promises others offer. The most significant political statement we can make is that Jesus Christ is the King.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was the most deadly century in the history of humankind. It also happens to be the century in which hundreds of millions of human beings put their hopes in secular messiahs who promised to bring about utopias. In the process, as many as 100 million people died, not because of war, but because of disastrous political and social schemes designed to bring the millennium.

Sinful, fallen human beings will not make a paradise of the Earth through the use of force. Rather, we should follow the Prince of peace and do everything we can to make him known to the nations. Ultimately, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, but it will not be because we created and implemented the perfect political plan. It will be because of Christ's love and his undeniable status as Lord. ★

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**Hunter Baker, J.D., Ph.D.** *is an author and the provost and dean of the faculty at North Greenville University.*

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1 David Koyzis, "Political Visions & Illusions: A Survey & Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies," IVP Academic, May, 2003.

2 James K.A. Smith, "Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation (Cultural Liturgies)," Baker Academic, August, 2009.



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# **NO PERFECT PARTY**

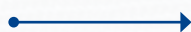
**PRUDENCE & PRINCIPLES**  
*for Stewarding Our Vote*

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Political parties have become an all-consuming identity in American culture. They are used to sort, characterize, and even vilify others. Godly men and women, committed to what God’s Word teaches about life, religious liberty, marriage and family, and human dignity, will use wisdom to make different choices regarding which candidates and policies they vote for. Understanding this will help us treat one another with kindness and be able to love one another across our differences, even as we have honest discussions about the implications of the gospel on all of our lives. To help foster constructive conversations with one another, we’ve asked four Christians with different voting patterns and principles to expound on how they makes their decisions. May it help you as you interact with fellow church members, family, friends, and neighbors this election season.





## REPUBLICAN PARTY

# KEEPING THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE

*Shannon Royce*

**Lindsay Nicolet:** How should Christians think about engagement in the political space?

**Shannon Royce:** All of us are thinking what a significant election year this is for us. So I start from a position of Matthew 5 “salt and light,” because every one of us, no matter our calling or capacity, are called as believers to live as salt and light. Some are like me for whom this is not just a personal biblical conviction but also my professional calling. So the way that I live this out in daily life will look different than the way a pastor, another minister, businessperson, or a mom lives it out.

Then, we have to ask the Lord, “How do you want me to live out this command?” It will look different, but I think if we pray about that, God will show us. Ministers have the gospel as their first priority. But when they are preaching through a passage of Scripture and it raises an issue that also happens to be in the policy space, they ought to speak to it biblically and let the fact that it’s also in the policy space not concern them.

As another example, I work with an organization called the Christian Employers Alliance, and we work with Christian business owners. We encourage them to be involved in their local communities, to live

out their faith, and to speak into this space convictionally as Christians. Another way this will be lived out differently is by your moms at home. They may be involved in the local school, the local district, or the PTA.

There are all kinds of ways we can be salt and light in the policy space.

**LN:** At the ERLC, our four lanes of work are life, religious liberty, marriage and family, and human dignity. What issues in politics are important to you, and why?

**SR:** At one point, I ran the D.C. office of the ERLC. So, these are all the issues that have occupied my life and work. In the Trump administration, I had the privilege of working at the Department of Health and Human Services and running the faith-based office there. I worked on other issues that were dear to my heart because they were human dignity issues. This played out in working on the opioid crisis and engaging those who are broken in that area. We also did work with those struggling with mental illness.

**LN:** Why is it important to you to be a part of the Republican Party?

**SR:** I’m a Southern Baptist preacher’s kid. My father was outspoken, not only on the

gospel, but also on the issues of the day. He said something to me that I’ve reflected on over the years, “Your last name is O’Chester, but your first name is Christian. Don’t ever do anything that would bring reproach on either of those names.” When I think about my engagement with the Republican Party, I remember that my first name is Christian. I am involved in the Republican Party, but that’s not my primary identity. So, I want my engagement there to be done in such a way that it does not bring reproach on the name of Christ or on my role as a believer.

**LN:** How does being a Christian influence your decision to be a part of the Republican Party? What is it that drew you or keeps you there?

**SR:** This arena is my life and work. So I look at this somewhat differently than many of your readers may. I’ve read the Republican and Democratic platforms, and for me and my convictional perspective, the Republican platform rings truer to me because it speaks in the way that I understand biblically on issues such as life, marriage, the importance of the family—a mother and father in the home, and biblical sexual ethics. But it also speaks to other things that are foundational culturally.

We live in a constitutional democratic republic. That means that from the perspective of the Republican platform, it believes that the federal Constitution explicitly limited the role of the federal government in our lives. There were enumerated powers given to the federal government, and everything else was supposed to remain with the states and with the people. That plays out in the Republican platform more than the Democratic platform, and that is important to me.

The other issue the platform addresses is our branches of government. We have the executive, the legislative, and the judicial branches. That's the way our Founding Fathers set it up. Unfortunately, in recent decades, we have what is typically known as the fourth branch of government, which is the administrative agency branch. Many of the "policy matters with which we struggle come out of the administrative state—things that are written by some regulation that then impinges on the rights of the American people.

**LN:** How do you think being a Christian can influence the political parties?

**SR:** We are called to live our faith out in everyday life. Being involved in a political party means that I speak into those issues that come up from my Christian worldview. I also interact with people in a loving, Christian way. There are people who I have strong disagreements with, and I'm still called to love and respect them as a fellow human being made in God's image. It doesn't mean I won't encourage them to think differently about an issue, but being salt and light includes a calling to love the people I'm involved with and speak truth to them.

**LN:** How would you answer Christians

who disagree with you and your reasoning for remaining with the Republican Party?

**SR:** There are many who fit in this category. I have a dear friend who is clearly to the left of me. I'm confident that she voted for our current president, when I did not. We have heart-to-heart conversations where we can speak openly because we are friends. And I think that's important. This is one of the significant losses our nation has experienced in recent decades.

We need to be engaging in relationships with others who differ from us. Their history and story may be the reason that

*Being salt and light includes  
a calling to love the people  
I'm involved with and  
speak truth to them.*

**- Shannon Royce**

they're in a different party than me. I can learn from them, and they can learn from me. I also remember Romans 14, which makes it clear that we are not the judge of others. We will each answer to God for the way that we live out our faith. So, I keep those things in mind when I am in a relationship or a disagreement with someone who is also a believer.

**LN:** How do you reconcile the imperfections or disappointments of the Republican Party with your participation in it?

**SR:** The reality is there is no earthly system that is anything but imperfect because it's made up of imperfect people. I think it's critical for us to have that accurate perspective. We should not expect our parties or

our candidates to be perfect. In maintaining that outlook, it keeps me grounded in what appropriate expectations I should have of the different parties. I am more aligned with the Republican Party than I am with the Democratic Party; there's no question about that because of my convictions. But I don't expect either party to be perfect.

**LN:** What encouragement would you offer Christians in an election year and political engagement in general?

**SR:** I would go back to where we started. We have to be mindful of God's command to be salt and light. We have the privilege and profound responsibility to choose our leaders in our nation. That's a responsibility. At the very least, you have to vote. You may vote differently than I would want you to vote, but go vote.

Secondly, God is going to call some of your readers to be involved in that electoral process and even run for political office. We need godly people to live and work in this area. It is a

hard arena, but we are called to operate and be engaged in that as American citizens and as believers. If we don't, our children and grandchildren will be the ones to pay for it.

Finally, it is critical for your readers to understand that they are not just voting for a president. They are voting for the 4,000 political appointees the president will choose who work to execute policy. Christians should have a view that includes not just the one person who will be president, but all the various responsibilities, appointments, and ramifications of who holds that office when they cast their vote. ★

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**Shannon Royce** is the president of the Christian Employers Alliance. The opinions expressed in this article are in her personal capacity.



## DEMOCRATIC PARTY

# ENGAGING WITH CHARITY

*Justin Giboney*

**Lindsay Nicolet:** How should Christians think about engagement in the political space?

**Justin Giboney:** We have to think about it as a matter of stewardship. As citizens, we've been given a certain amount of influence, and we need to use that influence pursuant to loving our neighbors as ourselves. So, engaging is really about stewardship. I think most people should engage; I can't say that you always have to, but I would say that it seems like poor stewardship if we don't. From there, it's how do we steward? I think that's with compassion and conviction, making sure that we're upholding what we know about God's design while loving others, especially the most vulnerable.

**LN:** At the ERLC, our issue set includes life, religious liberty, marriage and family, and human dignity. What issues in politics are important to you, and why?

**JG:** All the issues you named are very important to me. I would add, especially right now, housing, poverty in general, and racial justice. If we look at the disparities through a historical context, it's clear that we have more work to do. So, I focus in on

those along with voting rights and things of that nature.

**LN:** You have voted as part of the Democratic Party. As you think about who you're going to vote for, why is it important to you to sometimes be a part of that party?

**JG:** I don't know if I would say it's important for me to be a part of the Democratic Party. For me, it's a matter of strategy. I don't put my identity into a party. If there's a strategic way that I can advance the things we were talking about before, or I can reach more people based on which party I am voting within, then I'll do that. That doesn't mean I think the parties are equivalent on every or any issue. I don't think it's important to be a Democrat. I just think there's an advantage to it from my social positioning.

**LN:** How do you think being a Christian influences being a part of the Democratic Party from a strategic point of view?

**JG:** With all of its issues, and it certainly has issues, I think the Democratic Party historically has focused in on civil rights issues like voter rights. And I think that's

a matter of agency. If our government is going to tell people that their vote matters, then we need to make sure that's the case. It also gives me an opportunity to speak up on issues that the party wouldn't usually talk about. So, I get to talk about religious liberty to people who might not listen to it from somebody on the other side. I get to talk about the sanctity of life with the credentials to speak in that way on those issues within a space that might be left-leaning.

**LN:** Are there other ways your Christianity can have an effect on the party in which you vote, influencing them for good?

**JG:** When you see people in need, you have to look at what needs they have. Again, housing is a major issue, and as Christians, I think we have to care about that. I'm in the city of Atlanta, so when we work on that locally, it's good to have connections with people, whether they are spiritual connections or partisan connections. At the end of the day, civic engagement is all about glorifying God by serving and helping people flourish.

**LN:** As a Christian, if you're not addressing the practical needs of people, how do you think your witness is hindered?



**JG:** I think people view our faith as very limited or even self-interested in that we only fight for Christendom and issues that are viewed as ideologically conservative. Whereas, there's a variety of issues that I think our Christianity should drive us to speak into. We can't do all of them all the time. But that's why we're a body, and that's why some people in the body may be focused on one thing, while others focus on another. We have to be careful when we make everything about one particular issue—not that we can't prioritize issues, but usually these issues are not on an island. So, if we want to have an impact, it's usually from a number of angles.

**LN:** How would you answer others, specifically Christians, who might disagree with you?

**JG:** I don't always vote for the Democrat, but when I do, it's usually based on a cost-benefit analysis of who is the best based on the issues that I have prioritized. I would agree that it would be unfaithful if I vote for somebody who is pro-choice, and then I am not vocal about my disagreements on that issue or if I defend everything they do. Regarding candidates, we have to make the best judgment that we can. I don't think voting for a Democrat is clearly more problematic than voting for a number of Republicans for a lot of reasons. But I don't just assume that I need to vote for the Republican or for the Democrat. I vote

based on the merits of the candidate, which has caused me to vote for people in both parties at times.

**LN:** How do you reconcile the imperfections of the candidate you're voting for?

**JG:** If somebody is pro-choice and that was their only issue, I probably wouldn't vote for them. But, usually there are a number of other issues where we do have some agreement. I understand the brokenness of the world and that no candidate is going to match what I want exactly. If I was looking for that, I guess I probably wouldn't vote at all. But we tend to put those types of standards on the other side without necessarily putting them on our side. Instead, we defend or justify the negative aspects that might cause a Christian to have some pause about the people we're voting for. I think people have a right to disagree about which candidate best fits Christian values. It's an important question to ask, but we also need to be honest about how we're making that assessment for ourselves and the shortcomings of our candidate of choice.

**LN:** What would you say to Christians as they are engaging with other genuine believers who have different opinions and come to varying conclusions?

**JG:** I would remind them of the praying Pharisee who exalted himself while at the same time coming against the tax collector

and saying he was glad he wasn't like the tax collector. But only one of them walked away being justified. And it wasn't the Pharisee. I don't want to get into any relativism here. There are clearly issues that Christians need to be on the same page about. I think the sanctity of life is one of those. But again, those issues aren't on an island. Christians need to at least hear people out first.

One of the mistakes we make is that we try to argue with someone without even knowing the good that they're attempting to achieve. I don't think most Christians, in the issues that they choose to support, are trying to be sinister and wrong. If you can't articulate the good they're trying to achieve, even if you disagree with their conclusion, then you really don't know their side of the argument. And you're usually arguing against misrepresentations and caricatures. We spend far too much time doing that. So, I would say hear people out and remember that you can get things wrong too. We need to engage each other with a little more charity.

**LN:** What encouragement would you offer Christians in an election year, but also for political engagement in general?

**JG:** I would try to make sure when we're engaging others, that we're seeing people and not political abstractions. The folks that are in your opposition have stories. They're dealing with the human condition just like you are. Some are dealing with heartbreak, some are dealing with addiction, etc. So you can't identify someone just based on their vote. It really doesn't tell you as much about people as you might think. If Christians truly think of it that way, we'd be less polarized because we'd have a little more grace for others and be a little more willing to listen. ★

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**Justin Giboney** is an attorney, political strategist, and the co-founder and president of the AND Campaign.

*As citizens, we've been given a certain amount of influence, and we need to use that influence pursuant to loving our neighbors as ourselves.*

- Justin Giboney





## AMERICAN SOLIDARITY PARTY

# “OF TWO EVILS, CHOOSE NEITHER”

*Matthew T. Martens*

**Lindsay Nicolet:** How should Christians think about engagement in the political space?

**Matthew Martens:** I start with three principles.

First, in all areas of life, whether we eat or drink or vote or whatever we do, we should do it all to the glory of God—meaning we should do it in a way that reflects his character. There’s no aspect of my life in which I get to or should not want to follow Jesus.

Second, I would say the fundamental obligation of government is to protect life. You see this in the Noahic Covenant in Genesis 9:6 and in Paul’s writings about human government, where its most basic task is identified as protecting the innocent from evildoers (Rom. 13). A government that disclaims that task is illegitimate no matter what other good it does. A political candidate must be committed to that task to be morally qualified for office regardless of what other good policy he or she may promise to pursue in office. A government or a candidate that lacks a basic commitment to protecting innocent life is an evil.

Third, as Baptist minister Charles Spurgeon famously said, “Of two evils, choose neither.”<sup>1</sup> Or, as Paul put it in

Romans 3:8, we may not do evil that good may come of it.

So I think these are the minimum guiding principles for Christians as we think about engagement in politics and public policy.

**LN:** Are there particular issues you look at when you’re thinking about who you’re going to vote for?

**MM:** The most fundamental question I have to answer is one of basic moral qualification. I can’t get to the question of which candidate is better or worse until I first answer the question: will this candidate use their power of office to protect innocent life in all contexts? And if a candidate doesn’t satisfy that first threshold test, then they’re not even under consideration at that point.

I would divide issues into categories of good and evil as opposed to prudence or imprudence. I can vote for a candidate who I might disagree with on a matter of prudence, strategy, and political tactics but agree with on the definition of good and evil. For example, I could agree with a candidate that abortion is an evil and yet disagree on a matter of prudence regarding how to pursue the outlawing of abortion. I have to distinguish what I’m disagreeing or agreeing with a candidate about. Then, if we’re in

fundamental agreement about what is good and evil and they’ll use their office to pursue good and not evil, then I can evaluate which candidate I think is offering as a matter of prudence, the best way to pursue that goal.

**LN:** What is the American Solidarity Party? And why is it important to you to be a part of it?

**MM:** The American Solidarity Party is a recent political party in the United States that is on the ballot officially in some states, is an available write-in candidate in other states, and is working to get on the ballot in other states. Their party platform is largely a reflection of Catholic social teaching and neo-Calvinist theology.

It’s not important to me to be part of any political party. My commitment is not to any political party. My obligation and what’s important to me is following Jesus, glorifying God in whatever I do. As I tried to do that when making decisions for the first 25 years of my voting life, I always and only cast my votes for the Republican Party’s candidates because of their express pro-life stance. But in recent years, that’s no longer the case. In some instances, my voting for the Republican candidates would not be aligned with the three guiding principles

that I referenced earlier, nor would voting for the Democratic candidates. I think that's particularly true with regard to the upcoming presidential election.

Thankfully, there's a third-party candidate whose platform explicitly affirms a commitment to protecting human life and more generally opposes other forms of evil. That doesn't mean I have 100% agreement with that candidate or his platform, but my disagreements are around matters of prudence.

**LN:** How do you feel your Christianity can have an effect on political parties?

**MM:** To affiliate or have loyalty to a political party runs the risk that I am loyal to that party rather than loyal to Christ. I may vote for a particular party's candidate in an election, but I do not consider myself to have any attachment to that candidate's party.

I do think that Christians can influence a particular party or candidate. But I also think that there's a real risk that the party could influence us. We could compromise on matters of good and evil out of concern that we'll be boxed out of influence. And that's why we have to be committed to following Jesus first and foremost. That may mean being marginalized by not having influence. And that would be a problem if there wasn't a King of kings; but there is. So I trust that God is sovereign and my obligation is to vote against evil, for good, and make the best judgment I can when it comes to matters of prudence.

**LN:** How do you answer Christians who disagree with you?

**MM:** I suspect that the primary argument against my proposal to vote for the American Solidarity Party candidate, rather than the Republican candidate, is that I am in effect voting for the Democratic candidate, which I do not think is a credible argument. To start with simple arithmetic: If I vote for Trump, he has one vote, and Biden has zero votes. If I vote for Biden, he has one vote, and Trump has zero votes.

*My commitment is not to any political party. My obligation and what's important to me is following Jesus, glorifying God in whatever I do.*

**- Matthew T. Martens**

But if I vote for the American Solidarity Party candidate, he has one vote, and both Trump and Biden have zero votes. So, I have not helped Trump against Biden, but neither did my vote help Biden against Trump.

Do I think that across the full array of policy issues, Trump would do more good or at least less evil than Biden? Probably. But I cannot do evil that good may come of it. And empowering a candidate who has expressed his commitment to not protecting human life and who is using his position to affirmatively oppose pro-life laws is to empower a candidate who will pursue evil. I cannot hand the sword of the state to someone who has said they will not use it to protect innocent life.

So of two evils, voting for Trump or Biden, I will choose neither. Some might respond that this is throwing my vote away because realistically, one of the two major party candidates will win. My simple response is that victory by one of the major party candidates will occur if at all, only if my fellow citizens morally fail in casting their votes for one of the major party candidates, not because I have failed in casting mine for the American Solidarity Party.

**LN:** How do you reconcile the imperfections of the American Solidarity Party with your participation in it?

**MM:** I don't have 100% agreement with the platform of the American Solidarity Party

or its candidate's expressed views that aren't included in the party's platform. But my disagreements are on matters of prudence, not on matters of evil. So for example, the American Solidarity Party calls for "the immediate cancellation of existing medical debt." That strikes me as well intentioned, but imprudent, not evil. And that's an important distinction for Christians.

**LN:** What encouragement would you offer Christians in an election year, but also in engaging with politics in general?

**MM:** I'd offer two thoughts. First, some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God (Ps. 20:7). Our fate does not rest in the hands of men, not even seemingly powerful men holding government office. As Daniel says, God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men (Dan. 4:17).

Second and related, our hope is eternal, not temporal. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his Kingdom will have no end. ★

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**Matthew T. Martens** is an author, trial lawyer, a former federal prosecutor, and a research fellow at the ERLC.

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1 Charles Spurgeon, "Jude's Doxology," transcript of sermon delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, Nov. 7, 1875, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons52.xxvii.html>.



## INDEPENDENT

# FREED FROM POLITICAL TRIBES

*Brooke Medina*

CIVIL WAR. NATIONAL DIVORCE. SOFT SECESSION. Our nonstop news cycle has become a tragic feedback loop fueled by pundits and politicians. One of the greatest casualties is hope.

I frequently work with reporters and elected officials and am grateful to know many who do their jobs with goodwill and integrity. They pursue the facts and conduct themselves with professionalism and honesty. I also know a few who hungrily look for attention wherever it can be found, going so far as to fabricate narratives that mislead the public. The damage that the latter group has caused to civil society warrants reproof.

### **FREED FROM POLITICAL TRIBES**

Christians have an opportunity to bring calm and confidence to a nation that is on edge about the upcoming elections. We can, and should, take on the role of peacemaker. This is one of the reasons I am an Independent voter. It is not because I believe Republicans, Democrats, or other partisans cannot participate in political peacemaking. But I have found that my lack of allegiance to a party has freed my hands and loosed my tongue. Freed from political tribes, I don't feel lured into an us-vs.-them narrative.

Tony Woodlief, author of "I, Citizen," contrasts the role political parties played in generations past with the street theater they have become, writing: "political parties were once a source of unity, rather than division."<sup>1</sup> They were once vehicles for broad consensus among the civically engaged, a far cry from the agents of chaos they are these days.

### **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OUTSIDE OF A PARTISANSHIP**

It is true that membership in the Democratic Party or Republican Party has its advantages. The parties have money, winning candidates, and exclusivity. It's also true that not identifying as a D or an R has pushed my civic engagement outside of the confines of their conventions' priorities and prescriptions.

When I consider the worries that plague voters victimized by hyperbolic partisanship, I think about my neighbor and friend, "Ms. Ella," who happens to be in the same age bracket as both President Biden and former President Trump. Ms. Ella is a widow who lives alone in our neighborhood. Neither of her children live nearby. She has told me more than once that she is a proud Democrat. Ms. Ella informed me that she will not be

voting for “that man” (Trump), because “he’s going to take away my Social Security and I’ll be left to eat grass.”

“Left to eat grass.” Her biblical allusion made me think of Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar. The powerful and mighty king was reduced to the most humiliating and debasing of circumstances until he learned “that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (Dan. 4:32b, ESV). The story sends a tremble down my spine, chased by a fluttering hope that our elected officials brush up on their Old Testament fluency.

I reassured Ms. Ella that her Social Security wasn’t going anywhere (it’s nearly impossible to phase out government programs) and that she would never be reduced to eating grass, if for no other reason than I wouldn’t let that happen to her. But her anxieties replayed in my mind for days. The thing about fear is that it doesn’t have to be rational or reasonable to feel utterly paralyzing and true. And

for that, we should have compassion on those who are caught in the grip of the vicious news cycle and bad-faith political actors who see their *raison d’être* as raising as many blood pressures and campaign contributions as possible.

C.S. Lewis—the Southern Baptist’s favorite Anglican—leveled artful criticism at the bitter partisanship he witnessed among his countrymen during WWII. He captures it masterfully in “The Screwtape Letters” where the chief demon and Wormwood try to corrupt their patient’s soul via political extremism:

“All extremes are to be encouraged. Not always, of course, but at this period. Some ages are lukewarm and complacent, and then it is our business to soothe them fast asleep. Other ages

such as the present one are unbalanced and prone to faction, and it is our business to inflame them.”<sup>2</sup>

### AN OPPORTUNITY TO BRING PEACE

Lewis’ audience was well-acquainted with the dichotomy between the patriots and the pacifists, both sides digging their heels in, many attributing bad faith to the other. The polarization was stark across Europe. In some cases, it was existential. Hitler and Mussolini were terrorizing and slaughtering

*Christians have an opportunity to bring calm and confidence to a nation that is on edge about the upcoming elections.*

**- Brooke Medina**

millions. Economic uncertainty was in abundant supply. The hydrogen bomb had been discovered. Nietzschean nihilism, eugenics, and social Darwinism were ascendant.

Sometimes I wonder what he would think if he could have time traveled to our day and observed the catastrophizing and hand wringing that accompany our contemporary election discourse.

Yes, we live in a time that is “unbalanced and prone to faction,” yet for all of the pains and challenges we face, we are still far removed from the terrors that plagued much of the world 80 years ago. Indeed, much of the peril we face is generated not by external circumstances, but by the ideologues stoking division among us; the engagement farmers and grifters who revel in political panic.



The gift of living in this moment in history should not be lost on us. Whereas earlier generations confronted great forces that threatened to upend their societies, the chief danger we face is within our own hearts. Sometimes that’s the scarier prospect. Changing behaviors is easier than changing

hearts. Yet Christ’s good news reassures us that hearts can always be won, can be reordered toward the good, true, and beautiful. Each of us can push against the divisive narratives and fear mongering peddled by opportunistic media and political ladder climbers. We can bring peace and hope to the Ms. Ellas of the world. And we don’t need the backing of the Donkey or Elephant to do it. We need the resolved gentleness of the Lamb. ★

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1 <https://www.encounterbooks.com/books/i-citizen/>.

Chapter 5.

2 C. S. Lewis, “The Screwtape Letters” (New York: NY, HarperOne), 40.

PASTOR ROUNDTABLE



# WHAT IS A PASTOR'S ROLE IN POLITICS?

HELPING YOUR CHURCH APPLY  
FAITH TO THE PUBLIC SQUARE

*Lindsay Nicolet*



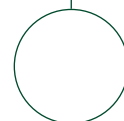


## THE PRESSURE DURING AN ELECTION YEAR IS HIGH FOR EVERYONE, ESPECIALLY PASTORS.

The last few years have seen the politicization of almost every area of life, which has affected our pulpits and pews. When every issue is coded as partisan and our churches experience internal division, ministry leaders may struggle with how best to teach and apply the full counsel of God's Word. So, how should a pastor engage in politics? What is his role in shepherding his people while facing politics head on? Jon C. Nelson, Eric Costanzo, and Daniel Darling have all had to wrestle with these questions and put their conclusions into practice. Our prayer is that their answers will serve you as you seek to minister well—keeping Jesus and his Kingdom front and center and equipping those under your care to be a source of hope to your community.

**Lindsay Nicolet:** What is a pastor's role in politics?

**Jon C. Nelson:** We, as the Church, are primarily focused on the eternal Kingdom of God, yet we also coexist within the temporal realm governed by God. The Bible does not shy away from addressing temporal concerns, including governance (Rom. 13). By simply imparting the teachings of the Bible, pastors inevitably educate their members about the role and significance of the state. We will unavoidably delve into political matters, discussing its potential virtues and the righteous means of pursuing it.



**Eric Costanzo:** Pastors are citizens of a nation and residents in a community. We have both a right and obligation to engage in political and civic issues. At the same time, our primary calling within the Church is to be a shepherd. Just as we help lead and guide our congregations to navigate life, family, and moral issues, so we also should shepherd churches in political matters by seeking the wisdom that comes from above (James 1:5).

**Daniel Darling:** It is not incidental that God has called American Christians to live in this time and country. Pastors can help people steward their citizenship in a way that is redemptive. This looks different depending on our callings. Some are called to run for office, work in policy organizations, or write and speak in public ways. Others are called to do more quiet and local actions. All of us, however, are given the stewardship of living in this country and helping shape the policies and people who rule over us.

So, a pastor must engage at the level of preaching, teaching, and equipping his people to live faithfully.

**LN:** How would you advise a pastor to preach about political matters in an election season and beyond?

**DD:** We first must recognize that the gospel itself is inherently political. When the first-century Church gathered weekly to declare that Christ, not Caesar, is Lord, they were making a political statement. By the way we are called to live, there is no way to avoid politics in this sense.

Pastors should prioritize preaching the Bible in a systematic, faithful way every week. It's also helpful at times to have special series, whether from the pulpit or in classes, that address specific cultural issues. However, people should be able to tell the difference between "thus saith the Lord" and "thus saith the pastor."

Pastors might also address the election season itself, speaking about the privilege and stewardship of citizenship, the scriptural position on the role of the church and the state, and the way Christ calls us to conduct ourselves. Scripture is not merely concerned with the *content* of our engagement, but with the *character* of our engagement. Pastors should urge people to be intentional about spiritual unity, "making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

**EC:** Pastors should wade carefully into political matters—whether in preaching, writing, posting, or conversations. People in our

churches are not only sensitive to these issues—many are afraid and are daily being fed information that only increases their anxiety. Therefore, we must not give in to the temptation to be like Chicken Little, running around and screaming, "The sky is falling!" We are called to believe, think, speak, and act as people of hope through Jesus Christ.

In terms of leading through preaching and teaching, I believe we must be patient. This kind of shepherding often takes longer than we might like.

**JN:** Throughout my years in pastoral ministry, I've encountered church members cautioning me against introducing politics into the pulpit, and often, their tone suggests a belief that the pulpit should remain uncontroversial. Paul exhorted Timothy to "preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2). Thus,

every pastor is tasked with delivering, teaching, and proclaiming the entirety of God's Word to the faithful, irrespective of the subject matter.

For pastors committed to preaching the Bible comprehensively, discussions on issues in political discourse—such as abortion (Jer. 1:5), same-sex attraction (1 Cor. 6:9-11), racism (Gal. 3:26-28)—are inevitable. Yet, the Word of God must serve as our ultimate standard and foundation for truth, not a political party.

As pastors, our duty is to faithfully deliver his Word to his

people, empowering the Church to stand firm in faith and confront societal challenges boldly, regardless of the political ramifications. Our congregants need the guidance of God's Word more than the opinions expressed on social media.

**LN:** What mistakes do you see pastors making when they address politics?

**JN:** Since 2016, we have seen a divide grow in each of our churches that is causing some of us to stumble and make mistakes that are harming the sheep we're called to shepherd.

First, pastors should not intentionally or unintentionally align with either political party. Though many of us are conservative in our politics, neither of the two major political parties aligns fully with the Kingdom of God. Actually, each political party finds itself trying to build its own kingdom. A biblically informed policy platform will be in conflict with both major parties.

JUST AS THE EARLY  
CHURCH DECLARED  
JESUS, NOT CAESAR,  
IS LORD, WE HAVE TO  
CONTINUE SAYING  
"JESUS IS LORD," NOT  
OUR PRESIDENT OR  
POLITICAL PARTY.

-JON C. NELSON





LEFT: Jon C. Nelson. RIGHT: Eric Costanzo.

Second, we have to continue to recognize a separation between church and state. Our faith and our politics cannot be separated, but our church and the state can be, and for the sake of both, must be, which is the traditional Baptist opinion.

Finally, since our inception, Christianity has been a deeply political religion. Just as the early Church declared Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord, we have to continue saying “Jesus is Lord,” not our president or political party. Our faith is also political from the standpoint that it creates a moral framework that is relevant to most significant issues in our society. But our focus must remain on declaring Jesus is Lord and none other.

**DD:** I think pastors make two mistakes. The first mistake is to avoid it and pretend election season isn’t happening. This is a well-meaning desire to not divide the church, but what this does is communicate to members that politics is one area over which Christ is not Lord. Pretending it doesn’t matter doesn’t make it go away. What’s more, if people aren’t equipped on how to apply their faith to the public square at church, they’ll learn somewhere else.

The other mistake pastors can make is the opposite one: becoming too partisan. The gospel is inescapably political, but we don’t need pastors who serve as pundits. God’s people don’t need from the pulpit more of what they are getting every day on social media, cable news, or talk radio. They need to hear a word from the Lord.

**EC:** There are some pastors and churches whose approach to

political, moral, and social ills in our country is engaging in “culture war.” Culture war tactics often involve partisan punchlines and incendiary language toward one’s opponents while turning a blind eye toward the wrongdoings of those on one’s team. These are the approaches of mainstream media pundits and algorithms set to produce profits through stirring up anger. They are not New Testament Christian approaches. Moreover, they are unbiblical and antithetical to the gospel message.

The Bible calls us to honor everyone, including our opponents, for the praise of the Father (Rom. 15:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:11-20), to follow the example of Jesus in our relationships with all (Phil. 2:1-11; 1 Pet. 2:21-25), and to always demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:18-22). We can address the political without being partisan. Partisanship by nature divides—us vs. them—whereas the Bible calls us as Christians to seek unity within the Church and to practice hospitality toward all (Rom. 12:9-21).

**LN:** What practical advice would you give for how to address political issues?

**JN:** Before we address political issues, we must encourage our members to pray for any of those involved in the political process. These individuals face hardship and need guidance from the Holy Spirit in order to make God-honoring decisions.

Additionally, we have to be careful not to preach the headlines. Between social media and network news, it is easy for us to regurgitate the arguments that we have been fed. We have to remember our charge to preach God’s Word, regardless of our

political affiliation, in order to win the hearts and the minds of those around us for Christ Jesus and not a political party.

Furthermore, we must be willing to critique all sides. It seems the majority of the country right now is fleeing to the extremes of political ideology and rhetoric. To have a nuanced conversation without flinging *ad hominem* arguments at someone seems unthinkable in today's discourse. When we are addressing political issues, we have to choose to speak the truth according to God's Word wherever we happen to see it and point people in that direction alone.

**DD:** A pastor should model the kind of Christian citizenship he preaches. First Peter 2:17 tells us how to order our priorities: Honor all men; love brotherly fellowship; fear God; honor the king. Some practical advice includes:

1. Find application in your sermons that fits the text.
2. Address the election, and give people wisdom on how to conduct themselves as God's people.
3. Be clear where Scripture is clear, and be openhanded where good and faithful Christians might disagree on matters of prudence.
4. Be political but not partisan, and endorse policies not candidates.
5. Model this wise behavior in your own public witness, both online and in the community.
6. And be intentional about equipping on important cultural issues.

**EC:** When we address those important issues that have political implications, we should engage them biblically, honestly, consistently, and charitably. From a practical standpoint, there are three things I've tried to make a part of the regular rhythms of our church life during the last several election years:

1. I remind our congregation frequently of our biblical responsibilities toward Christian citizenship and displaying Christ-like attitudes.
2. I plan some special events during the year where we have more of an topic-based conversation that might involve question-and-answer, guest teaching, or a panel. We have talked about a biblical approach to pro-life issues, immigration issues, racial reconciliation, and other cultural and social topics.
3. Our church provides practical resources that people can utilize alongside their study of Scripture and their prayerful engagement of challenging political issues.



Daniel Darling.

**LN:** What pushback can pastors expect if they choose to address or avoid politics?

**JN:** During the pandemic, I had a mentor tell me while I was lamenting the division within my church, "If you are hearing feedback in stereo, you are probably addressing the issue in the correct manner." To actually stand with what the Bible says creates a juxtaposition to both political parties and will cause you to stand not just on the Bible but each political parties' toes.

On the other hand, if we choose to avoid politics all together, we can expect a church that will question whether or not you're willing to wade into everything that God's Word speaks to. Members of our churches want to know how God speaks to the age we find ourselves in. We do our people a disservice when we avoid that.

**EC:** Dealing with political matters can quickly become divisive. I've found that much of the conflict comes from people's expectations. If those assumptions are challenged, conflict can often arise. This is not always a bad thing, however.

For example, several years ago, our church began actively serving our immigrant and refugee neighbors, which has become one of the most important commitments of our church. In the early days we faced conflicts related to cultural and political messaging about immigration that did not actually represent our experiences. We created spaces for dialogue and involvement in these ministries so that people could get a clear picture of the reality regarding who the immigrants and refugees are in our community, while also seeing the true gospel opportunities God was providing. Some people were unwilling to engage and left the church. Others were willing to be led by God through the conflict and came through on the other side with both a new understanding and an excitement about how God is truly at work in this ministry.

**DD:** Pastors will likely discover that they will get pushback for both. If you are gracious in your approach, careful in your exegesis, and relational with your leadership, you can often endure even when folks don't agree exactly with your approach.

**LN:** What encouragement would you offer the pastor who feels ill-equipped to address political matters?

**JN:** None of us are experts when it comes to politics. Don't feel pressured to speak about politics, but do inform yourself. Many times we're not fully aware of how devastating our silence can be to the people that we lead. But becoming aware while being biblically grounded can be one of the best things we can do for our churches. Find trusted sources that center the Kingdom of God over and above everything else. When we do, we'll find that topics that need to be clearly addressed can be done under God's Word.

**DD:** A pastor doesn't have to be a subject-matter expert in every public policy issue. There are certain issues that are clear from the text of Scripture. And there are other issues about which faithful Christians might disagree. A pastor should stay in his lane and not try to be a pundit. Some of our people may be better subject-matter experts in areas about which we know less. We should encourage them in their unique callings. God has equipped you, as a pastor, for your own calling in this moment to equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

**LN:** What should a pastor remember about our ultimate political hope?

**JN:** Dr. Tony Evans once said that a Kingdom-minded Christian should engage in the political process because "it is the opportunity and responsibility of committed Christians to partner with God by expanding his rule in society through civil government." This is not theonomy, but the opportunity to interject God's ideals within a culture that does not center on him. Our hope is not found in Republican or Democrat. The God of the Bible is

independent of all of those. The problem occurs when we believe either political party or ideology votes God's way all the time.

**DD:** Pastors should point people to the hope of the gospel. People in this moment are rightly concerned about the country, their communities, and their families. This is not wrong. And yet pastors should continually remind their members that we can "be of good cheer" for Christ has "overcome the world" (John 16:33). God has made us for this moment. He is not in heaven wringing his hands about the things that keep us up at night. God is gathering history to himself. He is not surprised by this election.

ALL OF US, HOWEVER, ARE GIVEN THE STEWARDSHIP OF LIVING IN THIS COUNTRY AND HELPING SHAPE THE POLICIES AND PEOPLE WHO RULE OVER US. A PASTOR MUST ENGAGE AT THE LEVEL OF PREACHING, TEACHING, AND EQUIPPING HIS PEOPLE TO LIVE FAITHFULLY.

-DANIEL DARLING

**EC:** To be fully transparent, I have a lingering anxiety about our church navigating this election year that probably won't go away until we're well past November. To this point, we've done great. But I fear the ugliest days of the election are yet to come.

For the most part, I'm not worried about the brothers and sisters at our church because I believe they are committed to following Christ closely through this year as they would any other.

My anxiety comes from

the strong grip of the "spirit of the times" in which we're living here in the U.S., especially as it comes to political partisanship, polarization, and toxicity. Sometimes it's almost too hard to resist.

Thankfully, no matter what tomorrow brings, the source of my faith and hope has not changed. If we are indeed entering troubled waters, there is One who is trustworthy and in whom we can anchor our lives no matter what comes: Jesus Christ—our Living Hope (1 Pet. 1:3). My faith and hope are not in our culture, our nation, or in people. My faith and hope are in the One who has promised us that, though we will certainly have trouble in this world, we can take heart, because he has overcome the world (John 16:33). ★

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# Pursuing GOOD

DISCERNING  
WELL-CRAFTED  
POLICY

An election year can quickly become about candidates. But, we often forget that those candidates and the people who will serve under their administration will run on a platform of policies that affect real people—our kids’ teachers, the clerk at the grocery store, our friends in healthcare, and our aging parents. Avoiding partisan talking points and seriously thinking about these policies from a biblical perspective is paramount to our call to be salt and light. This series of articles will assist you in what to look for and consider as you weigh policies dealing with life, religious liberty, marriage and family, human dignity, and foreign affairs. Together, we can use our voices and our votes to pursue the good of our nation. →





#### SBC RESOLUTIONS & ADVOCACY

### SBC AND VIETNAMESE REFUGEES (1975)

**Context:** Following the end of the Vietnam War, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese refugees fled the country for fear of persecution under the new regime.

**Resolution:** Southern Baptists recognized that many of them would not be able to return to their homes and called on churches to pray for them and aid in their resettlement.

**Result:** As a part of Operation New Arrival, over 130,000 Vietnamese refugees were supported and housed by the United States military until they were resettled by civilian agencies around the country.

## PROMOTING A CULTURE OF LIFE

GOOD POLICY BEGINS WITH UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN

Jason Thacker

When many Christians approach the ballot box this fall, abortion and other pro-life issues will naturally be top of mind, especially given the historic 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision and the subsequent ballot initiatives at the state level. Since *Dobbs*, it has become clear where many of our leaders (and aspiring leaders) on both sides of the political aisle actually stand on the dignity of all human life, from fertilization to natural death.

With the supposed constitutional “right to an abortion” in *Roe v. Wade* where it belongs in the dustbin of history, politicians can no longer hide behind ill-fated precedent. The commitment to being an autonomous individual, unencumbered by any sense of undesired or unchosen obligation to another has become a central facet of political discourse across the spectrum on pro-life issues.

Some promote the idea that a woman should be free to choose abortion since the human being in her womb is merely a “clump of cells,” embryo, fetus, or most

grotesque of all, simply “a choice.” Many across the major political parties seem to promote or be resigned to legal abortion after some arbitrary stage of human development. Others model this vision of the autonomous individual in debates over the ethics of in vitro fertilization (IVF) techniques or even in pro-life abortion policy that individuates the woman as solely responsible for the life within her.

### Championing the Value of Every Life

As Christians seek to engage the public square with hope, we must hold all of our leaders accountable to act consistently in ways that stand up for the dignity of all people and support the family as a building block of any healthy mutually dependent society.

We must champion the value of every human being—no matter the stage of development, location, or perceived cultural value. We are each made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28); a reality that is not dependent upon any mere capacity, characteristic,

or attribute. As German theologian Helmut Thielicke wrote, “God does not love us because we are so valuable; we are valuable because God loves us.” From the moment of conception, we are moral persons deserving of protection and have an obligation to stand up for that truth.

We must remember that no one is truly autonomous. Scripture affirms that we were created by a community (Triune God), in a community (male and female), and for community (the family, the Church, and society). We are indeed individuals, but individuals that exist in dependent relationships with others throughout our entire lives.

No matter what our culture may say, we must seek to put human dignity at the center of our political advocacy. This is especially true as we head to the ballot box and seek to elect leaders who represent our convictions and establish policies that protect the most vulnerable among us. ★

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## PROTECTING A FREE CHURCH IN A FREE STATE

*SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE DOESN'T  
EXCLUDE CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES FROM POLITICS*

*Matthew T. Martens*

“**C**hurch and state should be separate.” Those aren’t the words of Thomas Jefferson or of a modern irreligious progressive. Those are the words of the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (*BFM2000*).

### **At the Core of Baptist Identity**

That church and state should be separate isn’t to suggest that Christian morality has no role to play in shaping public policy. Every public policy reflects someone’s morality, and Christian ethics should not be excluded from debates in the public square. As the *BFM2000* puts it, “Christian[s] should seek to bring ...

government ... under the sway of the principles of righteousness.”

What is precluded by Baptist principles, however, is the state “impos[ing] penalties for religious opinions of any kind.” Rather, “all men” have “the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference from civil power” and “no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others.” These principles are every bit as much at the core of Southern Baptist identity as is believer’s baptism.

The commitment to religious liberty has a long pedigree in Baptist thought. John Leland, a Baptist minister in early America, argued that “religious matters are to be

## SBC RESOLUTIONS & ADVOCACY

### SBC AND EQUAL ACCESS LEGISLATION (1984)

**Context:** As part of a larger education agenda, the Reagan administration proposed legislation to strengthen the religious liberty of student groups in public secondary schools.

**Resolution:** In a 1984 resolution, the SBC affirmed its commitment to free speech, free exercise of religion, and opposition to the establishment of religion. It advocated for the Equal Access Act before Congress, stating that a of student-led and sponsored group should not be excluded from access to public school facilities on the basis of religious speech or content.

**Result:** The law was passed in 1984 as Title VIII of the Education for Economic Security Act and provided equal access for extracurricular student groups regardless of the religious viewpoint to public secondary schools.

itself in different ways. Some, today, advocate for a form of Christian nationalism that by law would preference Christianity in the culture. As noted above, legislation and other state action require that ethical judgments be made by government officials, and it is entirely appropriate for those officials to take Christian ethics into account in shaping public policy.

But this is very different from using the coercive power of the state to favor Christians and disfavor other religious practitioners as such. Some today are falling prey to this temptation, however, arguing that, contrary to the *BFM2000*, civil power should be used to bar non-Christian religions from constructing places of worship.

A similar threat to religious liberty is being posed by the increasing willingness of Baptists to take one another to civil courts to resolve what are fundamentally ministry disputes. Not only is this rebellion against clear biblical teaching (1 Cor. 6:6), but it also invites the state into a realm

*That church and state should be separate isn't to suggest that Christian morality has no role to play in shaping public policy.*

separated from the jurisdiction of the state ... because they are too high and holy and thus beyond the competence of the state.”

Or to put it more plainly, if you think doctrinal orthodoxy is hard to maintain among even a group of committed and likeminded Baptists, imagine the difficulty of maintaining orthodoxy if that obligation is assigned to a body politic comprised of disparate Christian commitments, not to mention non-Christians.

### Today's Temptations

The temptation to assign religious matters to the jurisdiction of the state presents

in which it lacks competence and jurisdiction. Given our long history of insisting on church-state separation, Baptists should not be inviting state judges to intrude into disputes over the governance of religious organizations and entities.

As we think about good policy related to religious liberty, we should be careful to remember these principles anchored in Baptist tradition. ★

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# CHAMPIONING GOD'S GOOD DESIGN

*PROTECTING SOCIETY'S FOUNDATIONAL  
INSTITUTION AMID RADICAL CULTURE SHIFTS*

*Hannah Daniel*

**A**s Southern Baptists, we believe that the family is the foundational institution of our society and that God has ordained the family order for our flourishing (*BF&M 2000*).<sup>1</sup> We hold that marriage is between one man and one woman for life, and that children are a blessing to those parents. Parents, then, have been endowed with special rights and responsibilities in the upbringing of their children and are the primary instructors and educators of their children in matters of faith, morality, and virtue.

## **An Unstable Culture**

However, we are living in a culture that has radically rejected these truths. We have repeatedly seen the state insert itself into the family unit, disrupting God's design and taking over the rights of parents. Through the rise in divorce, we've

seen families grow increasingly unstable, with more children growing up without the two-parent ideal. As society has given wholesale embrace to the LGBTQ movement, we've seen marriage redefined and children pushed into harmful, life-altering procedures if they are experiencing gender dysphoria and confusion. We've also witnessed children viewed as property with a right to be owned by parents rather than a blessing and responsibility to steward.

Alongside this cultural shift, many of our lawmakers have pushed forward policies that penalize and ostracize those who disagree. While our conscience protections remain strong in law and in the courts, this has not stopped school boards from hiding information about their child's chosen gender identity from parents, taxpayer funds from being used for "gender transitions," or the Biden administration from requiring foster and adoptive parents to "affirm" a child's



## SBC RESOLUTIONS & ADVOCACY

### SBC AND THE DANFORTH AMENDMENT (1987)

**Context:** In the 1980s, Congress put forward a bill which would have treated pro-life hospitals and medical clinics as practicing sex discrimination because they did not perform abortions.

**Resolution:** Southern Baptists released a resolution in support of the Danforth Amendment which would have prevented such an abuse of pro-life hospitals by ensuring that Title IX not be understood to grant a right to abortion or the funding of abortion.

**Result:** Passed in 1988, the Danforth Amendment strengthened conscience protections for pro-life organizations and medical providers.

### SBC AND HYDE AMENDMENT (1993)

**Context:** First passed in 1976, the Hyde Amendment banned the use of federal funds for abortion services. In 1993, opponents attempted to remove the amendment.

**Resolution:** Southern Baptists offered a resolution calling for the government to pass the Hyde Amendment and not pass other pieces of legislation which would have hindered pro-life advocacy and activism.

**Result:** A revised version of the Hyde Amendment was passed and has been passed every year since with the support of pro-life advocates.

chosen gender identity in order to be deemed able to provide “safe and appropriate care.”

#### Examining Candidates’ Views

As Christians consider their vote this November, it is vital that we examine how our candidates for elected office view these truths about God’s good design for marriage and families. In evaluating our options, we should ask ourselves whether a candidate will push forward policies that:

- strengthen families,
- bolster parental rights,
- safeguard the vulnerable,
- and protect the consciences of Amer-

icans who object to the falsehoods of the sexual revolution

Or, will their policies play a role in perpetuating falsehoods, push more children into irreversible harms, and allow the state to come between parents and their children.

It is important that we not limit this evaluation to the top of our ballots, though. Yes, the president can have a major effect on policies surrounding gender and sexuality, but so can our members of Congress, state representatives, local officials, and school board members. On these issues in particular, school boards and local officials often have the greatest role to play in creating an environment where families can flourish and parents can raise their children in a way that is consistent with their convictions.

Though Christians may ultimately come to different, good-faith conclusions about who to vote for in any electoral race, it is essential that we be clear-eyed about what our candidates believe on these topics and stand ready to hold them accountable to upholding the truth of God’s design. ★

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Hannah Daniel is the policy director at the ERLC.

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1 <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xviii>

*It is vital that we examine how our candidates for elected office view these truths about God’s good design for marriage and families.*



# HONORING ALL PEOPLE AS MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

*PRINCIPLES FOR COMPASSIONATE AND  
EFFECTIVE IMMIGRATION POLICY*

*Chelsea Sobolik*

**I**mmigration is one of the most important issues for American voters in the 2024 election.<sup>1</sup> And according to recent data from Lifeway Research, the majority of evangelical Christians say it's important for Congress to pass significant immigration reforms this year.<sup>2</sup>

## **Prioritizing Human Dignity**

In the ongoing discourse surrounding immigration policy, it's crucial to anchor discussions in the inherent dignity of every human being. Scripture is clear that *all* humans are created in God's image and have

innate worth, regardless of our race, ethnicity, citizenship, language, or socioeconomic status. Thus, everyone should be treated with respect and compassion. Upholding this principle requires policies that prioritize human flourishing and safeguard against exploitation and dehumanization.

Christians have a responsibility to hold every issue up to the light of Scripture rather than political partisanship, and allow it to shape us and our beliefs. In turn, we must be truth-tellers and accurately represent to the world what God's Word says on the issue of immigration.

## Principles of Immigration Policy

Scripture doesn't give us our immigration policies. However, it does offer a number of important principles that we can apply to our policymaking and our rhetoric on this topic. As we navigate the intricate landscape of immigration policy, the Evangelical Immigration Table, which exists to encourage distinctly biblical thinking about immigration and provide discipleship resources, has outlined six guiding principles for immigration engagement. These principles serve as a framework for crafting policies that are both compassionate and effective:

### Respects the God-Given Dignity of Every Person:

Policies must strive to protect and uphold the rights of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, ensuring they are treated with dignity and fairness throughout the immigration process.

### Protects the Unity of the Immediate Family:

Family unity is a cornerstone of healthy communities and societies. Immigration policies should prioritize keeping families together, minimizing unnecessary separation, and facilitating reunification

## SBC RESOLUTIONS & ADVOCACY

### SBC AND FETAL STEM CELL RESEARCH (2000)

**Context:** The SBC had spoken to fetal stem cell research in 1992 and urged Congress to not pass legislation removing restrictions and banning the use of fetal cells in stem cell research. In 2000, ahead of the November election, messengers called for candidates to declare their position and work to see the practice ended.

**Resolution:** The resolution also called upon state and elected officials to oppose the sale of human fetal tissues and take appropriate steps to stop the trafficking of baby body parts.

**Result:** In 2001, President George W. Bush signed into law the Fetus Farming Prohibition Act which banned the sale of human fetuses created for the purpose of stem cell research.

for those who have been separated due to immigration processes.

**Respect the Rule of Law:** Upholding the rule of law is essential for maintaining order and stability in society. Immigration policies should be grounded in legal frameworks that are transparent, consistent, and equitable, ensuring that the rights of both citizens and non-citizens are protected under the law.

responsible and ensure that taxpayers are treated fairly. This involves implementing mechanisms to prevent abuse of public resources while also recognizing the economic contributions that immigrants make to society.

### Establishes a Path Toward Legal Status and/or Citizenship:

For individuals who qualify and wish to become permanent residents, immigration policies should provide a clear and accessible pathway to legal status and, ultimately, citizenship. This pathway should be fair, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of immigrant communities.

Immigration policy can be complex, but these principles provide a roadmap to crafting compassionate and effective legislation.

As this issue will likely remain at the top of our newsfeeds and be of great interest to many voters, may our words be seasoned with salt, grace, and truth. ★

Chelsea Sobolik is an author and the director of Government Relations at World Relief.

1 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1362236/most-important-voter-issues-us/>

2 <https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-Evangelical-Views-on-Immigration-Report.pdf>

*In the ongoing discourse surrounding immigration policy, it's crucial to anchor discussions in the inherent dignity of every human being.*

### Guarantees Secure National Borders:

Securing national borders is vital for maintaining sovereignty and safeguarding against security threats. Immigration policies should include measures to strengthen border security while also addressing the root causes of migration such as poverty, violence, and persecution.

**Ensures Fairness to Taxpayers:** Immigration policies should be fiscally



# LIVING IN LIGHT OF GOD'S KINGDOM

*A VOICE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE IN A WORLD OF WAR*

*Paul D. Miller*

**G**ood thing Jesus told us to expect “wars and rumors of wars.”

Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, bringing the world closer to nuclear conflict than at any time since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Hamas invaded Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, in the largest single-day attack on Jews since the Holocaust. Iranian-backed Houthi pirates are choking international commerce through the Red Sea. And rising tensions on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait never stop threatening to erupt into general war.

The world feels wrong. The “post-Cold War” era ended some time ago. The younger generation has no memory of the relief, triumphalism, and boundless optimism of the 1990s. Whatever era we

are in now, it is one marked by:

- terrorism,
- hostile great powers,
- nuclear threats,
- pandemics,
- and pervasive anxiety about climate change and artificial intelligence.

## **A Voice of Peace and Justice**

Yet the Kingdom of God persists, dependent on and beholden to no earthly prince. That is why, amidst the wars and rumors of wars, Jesus still calls us to practice the spiritual disciplines of peace, joy, and self-control. The world feels out of control and is full of violence—just as Jesus said it would be. We don't have to understand it all, much less control it all.

Our calling is to be a voice for peace and justice amidst the tumult. As in all

our political engagement, we should “tend and keep” the garden God has given us (Gen. 2:15), including the garden of world order. We should “seek the welfare of the city” (Jer. 29:7) into which we have been exiled, including the city of all mankind. In all things, we should “do justice, and love mercy” (Micah 6:7), for our neighbors and our enemies, at home and abroad.

### Power for the Sake of Justice and Peace

Being a voice for justice and peace does not mean being a pacifist. Christians have long recognized that Jesus commissioned Caesar to bear the sword in order to keep evildoers in check (Rom. 13). The just war tradition, rooted in biblical theology, teaches us that governments have legitimate authority to use coercion to stop aggressors, criminals, and tyrants. Sometimes defending peace and justice requires force. Russia and Hamas will not be defeated by a stern talking-to. China and North Korea will not be deterred by a tweet. Power is necessary to keep order in a fallen world.

Necessary—but not sufficient. Christians should recognize that power is not the only language of international politics. While we can accept Caesar’s sword, we must always demand its responsible use. The sword is legitimate if it serves justice and peace for everyone, not the swordsman’s glory or the sword maker’s greed.

So we should listen to what politicians say and watch what they do when they make the case for war (or arms sales, or “intervention,” or diplomacy, or any other act of statecraft). Do they wield power for a just and lasting peace among nations, friend and enemy alike? Or are they moved solely by a narrow vision of their nation’s power, greatness, and prestige alone? ★

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*Paul D. Miller is a professor of the Practice of International Affairs at Georgetown University and a research fellow with the ERLC.*

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#### SBC RESOLUTIONS & ADVOCACY

### SBC AND UYGHURS (2021)

**Context:** Following reports in 2020 and 2021 that the Chinese Communist Party was perpetrating human rights abuses against Uyghurs, a majority Muslim ethnic group, Southern Baptists became the first religious body to call the actions a genocide.

**Resolution:** Their resolution condemning the genocide called for the U.S. government to take “concrete actions” against the “People’s Republic of China to bring an end to the genocide of the Uyghur People and work to secure their human treatment, immediate release from reeducation camps, and religious freedom.”

**Result:** The U.S. Congress passed the 2021 Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act and the 2024 Uyghur Policy Act which prohibited the sale of goods made by incarcerated Uyghurs and other minority groups and placed pressure on the CCP to release unjustly incarcerated Uyghurs.

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### SBC AND UKRAINE (2022)

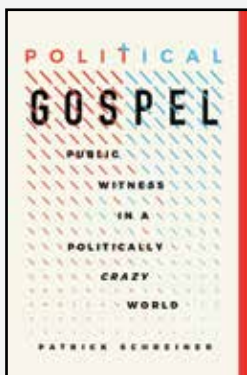
**Context:** Following the 2022 unjust invasion of Ukraine by Russia, Southern Baptists condemned the aggressive actions and created what was a “dire humanitarian crisis” as well as religious persecution of religious minorities.

**Resolution:** Southern Baptists offered a 2022 resolution which urged action on the part of U.S. government officials in support of Ukraine, as well as prayer for Christians in the region.

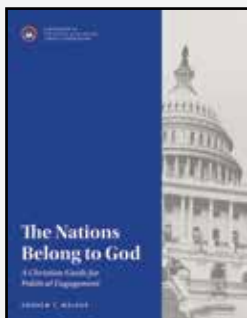
**Result:** In April 2024, the U.S. government passed military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, following the support offered by Southern Baptists and led by Southern Baptist Speaker of the House Mike Johnson.

*The sword is legitimate if it serves justice and peace for everyone, not the swordsman’s glory or the sword maker’s greed.*

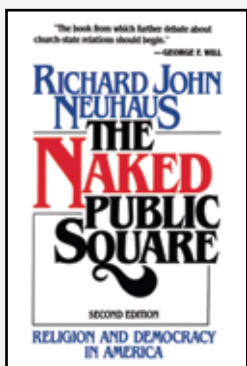
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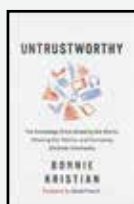
**Political Gospel: Public Witness in a Politically Crazy World**  
PATRICK SCHREINER  
B&H Books, 2022



**The Nations Belong to God: A Christian Guide for Political Engagement**  
ANDREW T. WALKER  
Leland House, 2024



**The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America**  
RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS  
Eerdmans, 1988



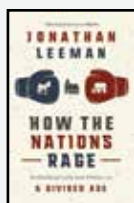
**Untrustworthy: The Knowledge Crisis Breaking Our Brains, Polluting Our Politics, and Corrupting Christian Community**  
BONNIE KRISTIAN  
Brazos Press, 2022



**The Politics of the Cross: A Christian Alternative to Partisanship**  
DANIEL K. WILLIAMS  
Eerdmans, 2021



**The Religion of American Greatness: What's Wrong with Christian Nationalism**  
PAUL D. MILLER  
IVP Academic, 2022



**How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age**  
JONATHAN LEEMAN  
Thomas Nelson, 2020



**A Time to Build: From Family and Community to Congress and the Campus, How Recommitting to Our Institutions Can Revive the American Dream**  
YUVAL LEVIN  
Basic Books, 2020



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