

## The Local Church and Politics

### I. Introduction

A. In a previous Briefing (#80) we discussed what happens when worldviews collide. We concluded that some kind of civil war in the U.S. is inevitable. Our concern in this Briefing is what effect this might have on the local church. It is inconceivable the church would remain unscathed. It won't!

B. Currently, as our country is witnessing its worst threat to civil disorder in more than a hundred and fifty years, the unity of the Body of Christ is at stake. The threat will come over three areas:

1. **Politics:** what role and form a government should have.
2. **Economics:** The view of wealth, how it is created and distributed.
3. **Moral Issues:** Who decides what is right and wrong? Is right behavior what the 51 % decides, or is there any kind of absolute standard?

Since the last presidential election in 2016, congregations all over the nation have felt the reverberations, and as I write, two major denominations are now hearing rumors of schism. Never before in the history of our nation has there been more polarization over political issues, and no local body will escape its divisive and harmful effects!

C. In Our Lord's High Priestly prayer in John 17:20ff, He prays for the unity of all believers. He prays that their unity will reflect the unity of the Trinity. He further prays that this unity will be a strong apologetic for their message of the Gospel. **The unity of the Body, the Bride of Christ, was of utmost concern, and was directly related to the success of their mission. Therefore, the unity and harmony of the Body must have the highest priority in a local congregation if it is to be successful in it's evangelistic imperative.** But one caution; *it must never be unity at all costs*. The Cardinal Doctrines of the faith, and of the great creeds must never be compromised. The Church should never allow the culture to press the Church into its mold, rather it, is the duty of the Church to be salt and light wherever it exists.

D. Therefore, it is highly recommended that local congregations seeking to fulfill The Great Commission have some guidelines to maintain the unity of the Body when political disruptions occur (and they will).

### II. The Root Causes of Political Controversy in the Local Church

A. I think it is safe to say that the majority of controversy arises due to individual believers being at different stages in their development and grasp of the Biblical worldview. Just as Christians are at different levels in their spiritual growth, so also are they at different levels in understanding a systematic teaching of theology, i.e., the Biblical worldview.

B. Another reason why clashes develop is that political opinions are held with a high degree

of emotion because governmental and economic issues affect every area of our lives. They affect our freedom and well-being. Political and economic views are sometimes so tenaciously held they almost take on the characteristic of a religion. In other words, **their political convictions constitute their real worldview**, and it is those assumptions that really determine how they think and act. From Briefing # 74 I wrote:

*The emotionally charged nature of confrontations with postmodernism, in my opinion, are due to the fact that their political ideas constitute their real worldview, or at least what they regard as the most important aspect of their worldview. As noted above, their political views have become a substitute religion. The emotions and passion are due to its defense. (A worldview is a system of beliefs; it is what we really believe about the world (universe) and ourselves and how we fit into the scheme of things, and it is these beliefs which influence our thought and action.)*

Brian Mattson writes:

*Many have come to share the belief that somehow politics belongs to an entirely separate realm from religion and that God simply doesn't care about political issues, or they have embraced postmodern multiculturalist pragmatism and deny that one set of principles is better than any other. **Politics & Evangelical Theology**, p.6.*

So, if the Christian religion is a worldview, and it is, then religion and politics do mix!  
**Our worldview must inform us about all areas of life, politics and economics included.**

- C. Some Christians mistakenly believe that there are areas of neutrality where the Christian worldview does not apply, such as in the form of government or economic systems. You will often hear it said: *God does not care about the form of government* (democrat, republican, monarchy, dictatorship, etc.) *or the form of economic system* (free enterprise or socialism). I don't think that idea can be dogmatically held to. Some forms of government are more in conformity to Biblical principles than others. Politics and economics as well as any other subject, are to be seen through the lenses of the Christian worldview.

### III. What Responsibility Does the Leadership of a Local Congregation have in Avoiding Political Disruptions in the Body?

- A. The main responsibility of pastors and teachers is to teach the Word in such a way that all believers are led to maturity, not only in their thinking, but in a way that their behavior conforms to the Biblical worldview. Some issues will take a great deal of courage to address from the pulpit, and, they must be dealt with in such a way that it is the authority of Scripture that speaks and not the preacher's opinion.

- B. More specifically the teaching of the Word must be applied to whatever are the relevant issues of the day. These will vary from culture to culture. For example: one of the most hotly contested issues currently is *abortion*, and while this subject may not be mentioned in Scripture, there are sufficient principles taught in Scripture to guide one's thinking to act decisively. (I am not aware of any issue where we can say *the Scripture is totally neutral, or where we cannot find some principles for application.*)
- C. Church leadership should be an example in praying for the government and its leaders, regardless how heinous they might be. When the Apostle Paul exhorted his readers to pray for kings and those in authority in I Tim. 2:1-2, the infamous Nero was emperor of Rome! It is very interesting as to the reasons why Paul tells us to pray for government: *that we may live peaceful lives in all godliness and holiness.* Christians should be praying, and then voting to maintain their freedom to worship appropriately, and to live their lives in conformity to Biblical ethics.
- D. Church members should be encouraged to be involved in their civic duty, to be biblically informed about the issues, to register to vote in order to bring about a form of government which most conforms to biblical principles (restraining evil as the Bible defines it). It is our civic duty to be politically involved. To not be involved is to be involved! Silence is a statement.
- E. All the while the Local Church must never lose sight of the its mission—Preaching the whole Gospel to the whole man.

#### IV. What Christians Should not Do

- A. In the early history of our nation it was common for preachers to address political issues openly from the pulpit and even to endorse political parties and politicians by name. In 1954, President Johnson, who was then a Senator, had a law passed (the Johnson Amendment) that made it illegal for non-profit organizations and churches to engage in politics with the penalty of losing their tax exempt status. This law is probably unconstitutional according to the First Amendment, but it has never come up in the Supreme Court. Even today it is largely ignored in the African American community. Nevertheless, it seems to me, that given the current political situation, and the polarization brought about by opposing political views, **it is prudent that church members should be encouraged not to campaign for a political party or campaign for individuals by name for the sake of the unity of the Body of Christ.** This is not to say that we should avoid issues. These, as noted above, should be addressed skillfully, with love and gentleness from a biblical perspective.
- B. Maintaining fellowship is the key, and the spiritual success of the church depends upon it. The basis for that fellowship according to John's Epistle is always centered around the Lordship of Christ. Differences in political opinion cannot only destroy that

fellowship which is the basis of church unity, but has the potential to destroy whole ministries.

- C. When political disruptions occur (and they will) the emphasis should always be: what does the Bible teach, and how do you purport to defend your view from a biblical perspective? For example, if a brother or sister has an opposing political belief, the proper action is not to separate from fellowship, but to engage in conversation. My suggestion is to probe with questions as to how they arrived at this conviction and to learn how they defend their view from Scripture.

## V. Summary

The authority of Scripture is always paramount. If the Bible is not the ultimate authority in settling disputes, then opinion, emotions and loud shouting will prevail. All discussions must ultimately come back to what God has revealed in His Word. What will be particularly important in the discussion of forms of government and economic theory, is what the Bible teaches about the state of man, i.e., the doctrine of anthropology.

## VI. For Further Study

Those noted with a \* are highly recommended.

\**Political Christianity: A Call to Action.*

Beckwith, Francis J. *Politics for Christians* (Contains an excellent bibliography).

Brand, Chad, and Pratt, Tom. *Seeking the City.*

Budziszewski, J. Bud. *The Revenge of Conscience.*

Davis, John Jefferson. *Your Wealth in God's World.*

\*Grudem, Wayne. *Politics According To The bible* (600 pages!).

\*Mattson, Brian G. *Politics & Evangelical Theology.* This is the best treatment that I'm aware of.

Nash, Ronald H. *Social Justice and the Christian Church.*