



VOTING CHRISTIANLY¹

This is obviously something about which we need to be in much prayer. We need not, and I suggest ought not, to wait for an election cycle to give thought to this matter.

While my book *Preaching and Politics: Engagement without Compromise* (Wipf and Stock, 2009) lays out my convictions as to how far and in what manner a preacher ought to go in speaking of politics, there are nevertheless a number of specific pieces of advice about the current political landscape and atmosphere I feel burdened to pass along.

It is requisite on the Christian to—

1. *Be balanced.* Whoever wins, Jesus remains enthroned. Our first loyalty as Christians is to his Kingdom, although loyalty to it will make us good citizens. This balance is crucial to all that follows.
2. *Be Active.* Trust in the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men should not make us inert. Quite the opposite, for in predestining all things that come to pass, God has not only ordained (established the fact) of all that happens, but the means as well. God has richly blessed lands influenced by Judeo-Christian values. As Christians we have the fruit of those blessings to defend, and the nation's sins to lament and to work against. While laws cannot change the heart, they can put a bridle over its waywardness, and encourage good citizenship.
3. *Be informed.* American geographical isolation, her current preeminent standing in the world, the lack of independent outlets of news and analysis, and the competition for TV ratings, conspire against our ability in the United States to hear other points of view. The demonizing of others in the country and outside of it is a real hindrance to mature public discourse on important issues

that really matter in this earthly sphere. Rather than challenging this mutual demonizing, I fear the church has been influenced by it. Dig deep and do the homework. As Christians, we are people whose concern is truth and not caricatures (Prov. 18:13, 17).

4. *Be theological.* Take your theology into the week, applying it to what you hear. Critical to the election is, it is said, the size of the government desired by the electorate. While all government requires accountability, when critiquing it never forget that civil authority was ordained by God. We can try and soften this teaching, and yet we will struggle to do so when we recall Paul taught this in connection with the imperial authorities of Rome (Rom. 13:1–7). We certainly advocate the freedom of the people from tyrannical government, but do not forget “We the people” have our own sins, too. The American administration may allow abortion, but its “We the people” who produce the demand for it. It is the government, supported by the Second Amendment of the Constitution, that allows the widespread availability of guns, but it is “We the people” who use them on each other. There is only so far we can go, then, in blaming government. The business sector must take its share, the church too, as well as the man in the street. We are all in this together.
5. *Be thankful.* While there are many democracies around the world that run elections fairly, we can be thankful to God we live in a country in which we, the people, have a choice of our rulers. Some may not like the choice, but any choice is better than none.
6. *Be Christian.* Pursuing truth and fairness, doing the homework and refusing to repeat caricatures mindlessly, is what ought to make Christian political discourse stand out as superior. Grace is also requisite. We may be righteously angry against injustice, corruption, and poor decisions with painful consequences, all the

¹ The following tips appeared in the October *Voice* magazine of Seventh Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, in anticipation of the November 2012

Presidential election in which the incumbent President Obama defeated Republican Mitt Romney.



same grace should mark us out wherever and whenever it is possible and appropriate.

7. Above all, *be prayerful*. We pray for the entire outcome of the election, but we pray especially for those believers we know stand for election. Races can be cruel and unjust. Christian candidates need the wisdom of God and the love and prayers of God's people. As privileged as service is in the public square, it is not without its spiritual and social challenges.
8. *Be hopeful*. We end where we began. Personalities and powers rise and fall, but God's plan to establish his kingdom cannot be thwarted. In the words of the hymn of Maltbie Davenport Babcock (1901):

This is my Father's world:
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
Why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King: let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let earth be glad!

As universal king, God reigns through his exalted Son. To him has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He has promised us he is with us, literally, all days (every day and all day long) until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). Let us keep our eyes on him!

Let me leave you with the benediction Paul pronounced over the Christians of Rome, for if it was good enough for them, with all the opposition they faced from unbelieving Jews on the one hand and pagans on the other, it is good enough for us: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Amen!