

The Campaign Chaos

This election year, how can we leave biblical imprints instead of bitter scars?

by PAUL H. JIMENEZ

POLITICS WEIGHS on the minds of many. From the winter primary season to the political conventions, the fall campaign looms heavily upon us. From the airwaves to talk radio to social media, it will be hard to evade the overwhelming influx of political information. Similarly, opportunities to pronounce what we believe politically will be prevalent. We'll find ourselves talking politics with family members, friends, coworkers, and the moms and dads who sit next to us on the bleachers at our kids' and grandkids' games. And let's state the obvious: Not everyone believes as we do when it comes to our preferred candidate or party or political viewpoint.

So what perspective do we need to have as we engage with others who do not believe or think as we do in the chaos of the campaign season?

First, we need to be careful that we're shaped more by the Bible than by cable news, talk radio, and social media. It's easy to have our thinking swayed and then reinforced as we entrench ourselves into our favorite political bunker. Over time, we no longer think and ultimately speak with the wisdom of the Word but with the language of political warfare. Our default position becomes "we're right and they're wrong" or "how could anyone who calls himself a Christian see it any other way?" Before long, we become identified more as political agents determined to win a fight rather than ambassadors of the King who has already won the ultimate fight for the souls of men and women.

Second, the Bible reminds us that our biblical convictions on politics or government are not communicated in a vacuum but are amplified by the way we express our love for other people. The apostle Peter wades into politics in his letter to the followers of Jesus, scattered across the Roman Empire. In 1 Peter 2:13-17, he writes to instruct and encourage those suffering under persecution for their faith. For many, this persecution came from governmental authorities who claimed allegiance to Caesar as opposed to loyalty to Jesus.

"Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil" (1 Pet. 2:16).

In other words, the kingdom story advanced by Peter and the followers of Jesus didn't ignore political realities. "Jesus is Lord" is about as radical a political posture that you could take on the streets of first-century Rome or Philippi. Yet Peter addressed the politics of the day in the gospel-infused light of loving God and loving others.

Honoring people, especially those we disagree with, requires a humility that doesn't bulldoze our political way forward. On the other hand, it recognizes that their moral compass might not be connected to the gospel. It might be tethered to a worldview filled with disillusion, anger, pain, and ultimately offense by the gospel. So what they might need is more than the reason why our favored political candidate is the best choice and theirs is the devil. While explaining our biblical position, we might need to remember the biblical injunction to do so in a way that loves them like we love ourselves. They might be the perfect candidate for the "honor" that surprisingly comes from someone who doesn't think like they do. Furthermore, choosing the path of humility demonstrates that we are "not using [our] freedom as a cover-up for evil" (1 Pet. 2:16), but we operate in the fear and service of God.

So ask yourself these questions: When you click Send on the post or walk away from a political conversation, what kingdom imprint will be left in the hearts and minds of others? Will people remember your passion for a political viewpoint or candidate more than a desire to extend biblical truth as well as care for their hearts? Is your political voice and identity marked more by Peter's commands to honor and love everyone and to fear God or by your political preference? When the election is over and you see those individuals again in the ensuing days, what will be the expressions of their heart if they were honest? May God help us all speak truthfully, wisely, and lovingly this political season. ☪

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