

“How to be Apolitical in Ministry”

We are serving in a day and age in which political rhetoric has been ramped up to the point where many are avoiding social media, sporting events and disassociating themselves from friends and family. Unfortunately, this rhetoric is even working its way into pulpits, churches and ministry environments. Many pastors and Christian organizations are jumping into the fray by speaking out or taking stands on certain hot-button issues of our day not wholly from a biblical standpoint, but from a political one.

This has led to a deeper division within the Christian community based solely on party affiliation or voting records. Churches are now known for their political affiliation rather than their ministries or even the gospel. Sometimes as church leaders it is easy to confuse our political ambitions with our calling to preach the gospel and care for Jesus' church. Attendees are forced to now factor into their decision of joining a church based on that church's political climate.

We cannot erect artificial barriers to the gospel! This is very similar to what Paul was facing in the letter to Galatians regarding the Judaizers who were forcing pagan Christians to become Jewish before they became Christians (Gal. 2). Even Peter and Barnabas were treating these fledgling Christians differently.

However, the opposite is just as dangerous, too. Christians can ignore the moral conversations of the day and make our faith appear irrelevant by sticking our head in the sand or simply preach the gospel without any connection to real life issues. Scriptures are full of examples of Daniel, Joseph and Esther using their faith to influence governments.

So, what is the balance? How can we apply the gospel to the issues of our day while remaining apolitical? Here are a few guidelines...

1. Don't allow political allegiances dictate your level of care to a person.

In this political climate it is easy to vilify those from across the aisle. When that happens it truly is hard to love and serve anyone who we deem as “the enemy.” The parable of the Good Samaritan was precisely Jesus' point! He was showing a Jew, who wanted to be justified in loving only those who were like him, how to be a neighbor to even Samaritans (Luke 10)! Our earthly allegiances must take a back seat to our mandate as Christians to show Christ's love to everyone.

Matthew 5:44 (NIV)

⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Ask yourself these questions:

“Can I see you as a brother/sister in Christ and not as a political opponent?”

“Can I share a meal with you regardless of our differences?”

*"If called upon, am I willing to sacrifice for you even though we don't agree?"
"Can I stand beside you in a service and worship Christ together?"*

Assess the condition of your heart and see if your view of a person isn't improperly tainted by politics.

2. Make sure the issues have clear biblical ramifications before speaking out.

We need to know the difference between political convictions verses biblical ones. As heated as today's topics are, sometimes it is hard to tell the difference. Issues such as abortion, homosexuality, immigration, do intersect with scripture at some level and deserve an objective dialogue from a biblical worldview. However, we can never use our ministry influence to promote a candidate, political party or even a political movement (Black/Blue Lives Matter, Tea Party, #MeToo, Antifa, etc.)!

1 Corinthians 2:2 (NIV)

² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

When you need to, use biblical references instead of partisan quotes or soundbites from pundits or talk show hosts when speaking out on moral issues. Help our people see specifically what scriptures have to say on any given topic, whether it lines up with your beliefs or not. If you ever are in doubt as to whether an issue you feel deeply about truly does intersect with scripture, please get approval first from an LVCC pastor.

3. Express your political interests in your personal time very carefully.

You are free to be as politically involved in your personal time as you want. However, as a church leader at LVCC, be careful how you express your endorsements or political convictions. People can read our social media posts, see lawn signs we've erected or see slogans on our clothing. This may cause some of the people we serve to pull away from you and your ministry, especially if they sense a lack of objectivity or that your political leanings will work its way into your teaching and ministry.

1 Corinthians 9:22-23 (NIV)

²² ...I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel...

When expressing your political views and allegiances privately be very cognizant of how it may be affecting your ministry.

4. Help those who are immersed in partisan politics to keep their priorities on Christ.

Much of the veracity of people over politics can be traced to a level of idolatry; people have put way too much trust in the government over God. Even some Christians tend to panic when an “ungodly” leader is elected. The truth of the matter is Christianity doesn’t require a moral government or even a “godly” leader for it to thrive. In fact, Christianity has experienced the greatest growth and purity when an “ungodly” leader who is hostile to Christianity is in charge! Our first priority as Christ-followers must always be on God’s kingdom, not man’s (Matt. 6:33). We need to help them assess their heart for any hint of idolatry. Teach people a proper relationship to the government:

- Governments are temporary (Dan. 2:44; Rev. 5:9-10)
- God is sovereign and rules over all governments (Ps. 22:28)
- God has instituted the government and calls us to submit to it (Rom. 13:1)
- We are to pray for its leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-3)
- We are to honor those in charge (1 Pe. 2:17; Luke 20:25)
- We are to love our “enemies” (Matt. 5:44)
- We are to seek first God’s kingdom not man’s (Matt. 6:33)
- We are to obey God above all else (Acts 5:29)

Proverbs 21:1 (NIV)

¹ The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

Conclusion

In all the years I’ve preached and taught, I’ve made it a point to keep the pulpit free of politics. I’ve even tried to keep people guessing as to which political party I’m registered with or who I’ve voted for last election. However, when it comes to the moral issues of our day, I do want people to know what the bible says about it! Today more than ever we must be very careful to discern the differences between my political convictions and what the bible has to say regarding the issues of the day. May LVCC continue to be a safe place to hear the gospel effectively and clearly, regardless of one’s affiliation.

Galatians 6:14-15 (NIV)

¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.