

The Timeless Voice: America, and God, in times of pain

Commentary by Greg Baker

The past few months have been difficult for America. From hurricanes to forest fires to a tragic shooting in Las Vegas, our nation is going through painful trials. It is a cold, hard reminder that this world is perishing. It is decaying. From our bodies (2 Corinthians 4:16) to the planet itself, our world is dying (1 John 2:17).

We are witnessing continually the consequences of the Fall, sin, and death. We are witnessing how they are not only destroying us, but our planet as well. As each day passes, sin does more and more damage to creation.

“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” – Romans 8:20-21

This reality has left the world puzzled, and many have turned to government for help. Now, government does have a job to do – it is God’s institution of justice. And government must work to protect people from wrongdoing in the world.

But government can only establish laws and punish lawbreakers; it cannot deal with the heart of the lawbreaker or the internal suffering of man. In other words, it cannot solve the real problem. For that, the world needs the Church.

Just as government must seek justice, the Church must speak the Truth to where the real problem is: people’s hearts (“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick;

Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9). The difficult truth is that man apart from God is prone to all nature of evil desires. Greed, lust, pride, selfishness, envy, coveting, and more lurk in all of our hearts (Galatians 5:19-21). Left unchecked, and in the proper circumstances, these things can lead us to do the most awful things. That is what we witnessed in Vegas.

Therefore, the Church must proclaim God's plan for redemption, a plan in place from the moment sin entered the world. Yes, sin has separated us from a holy God, but He has a plan to redeem people back to Him. He has a plan to save us from ourselves, our sin, and from this perishing world.

The world needs the Church to warn that we can never achieve this redemption on our own, no matter how hard we try. The Church needs to help the world see that it is not only the infamous criminals that fall short, but every single one of us has fallen short (Romans 3:23).

The Church must share with the world that God has an answer for all of this, and that answer comes from His Son. God took the punishment that every one of us deserves and put it on His Son, who did what we can never do – live a perfect, holy life – and therefore deserved no punishment ("God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" 2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus took the wrath, the justice, by paying for our sins on the Cross.

The world needs the Church to share the message that this is available for all people. Anyone who repents and believes in Christ has eternal life. Not because of anything they have done, but because of what Jesus has done. The debt has been paid (Romans 10:9-11).

Ultimately, our suffering world needs the Church to paint the picture of restoration. First, that when a person comes to know Christ, that person is born again, a new creation (2

Corinthians 5:17). But that is just the beginning of the restoration process. For someday there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and we will have new bodies, and sin and suffering will be no more. People need to hear this hope.

Yet they will likely ask why that day is not today. Why does God permit this suffering world to continue?

Thus the Church must speak of God's patient mercy toward us all. We must understand that in order to create a new creation, God has to destroy the current creation. And He is not ready to do that yet because many have yet to Christ as their Lord and Savior. Our temporary suffering, as great as it may be, pales in comparison to the eternal suffering of those who reject Him. So God is patiently giving us time before judging creation.

You and I must take advantage of this time of patience. The world must know God wants all people to come to the knowledge of Him, so He waits.

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"
– 2 Peter 3:9

Yes, there is much government can do to protect us from pain. Government, along with the Church, must commend the good done amidst all these tragedies. People risked their lives by charging into bullets to save strangers and people have given millions of dollars and thousands of volunteer hours in natural disaster regions. Despite our sin, people still bear the image of God, and we must celebrate when they embrace that image. Government and the Church must work together to meet people's needs amidst these natural disasters, and government must work to find ways to prevent future tragedies like Las Vegas.

In the end, however, this world is perishing, and God will someday call all of these things into judgement. The Church must speak to Truth of the gospel in this world, while we are still in this time of patience. For ultimate hope is not found in this earth – neither in our good deeds nor in our government – it is found in the earth to come, and God desires all people join Him in it, and so must we.

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Timeless Voice: The 2 virtues of godly government

Commentary by Greg Baker

“King David reigned over all Israel, doing what is right and just for all his people.” – 2 Samuel 8:15

King David was God's chosen governing authority over Israel, and he did what was right in God's eyes, because David was able to fulfill government's God-given purpose: justice.

Government is an institution of God's with the purpose to punish evil and reward good (Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2). Government is also a gift from God. When sin entered the world, God could have easily left us to our own vices, but in His mercy He gave us government. He gave us a unique institution designed to give fallen people law, order, and stability in a world being destroyed by the chaos of sin. It is our great protector. That is why God calls all governing authorities His “ministers.”

Administering justice, however, can be very tricky. You must understand who God is to administer true justice, for justice is part of God's character. God loves justice (Isaiah 61:8); He requires justice; and yet ... He is also God of mercy and compassion. These two virtues – justice and mercy – are somehow woven simultaneously into the character of God. And for government to reflect God's design, it must also reflect His character – and that means ruling with both virtues, justice and mercy.

The Cross is a beautiful symbol that reveals the God of grace, mercy, compassion, and justice. God offered people grace, mercy, and compassion by offering a payment for sins, yet He still had to carry out justice on His Son.

“This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.’” – Zechariah 7:9

On one hand, administering justice includes both punishing the evil and rewarding the good. Rewarding the good incentivizes and elevates good behavior. Government is not only a discourager, but also an encourager. Commend the good.

Yet punishment is still necessary: “Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them” (Proverbs 13:24). Punishment is a form of discipline. God disciplines those He loves. Discipline teaches us a lesson and guides us to the correct path: “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). True justice will always include discipline.

All justice must be fair, blind, and applied equally. God demands it: “Differing weights and differing measures, both of them are abominable to the LORD” (Proverbs 20:10). That means justice cannot favor a race, ethnicity, sex, social-economic

status, or any other way the world divides us. It must be fair for all people.

But even then, government must also never forget mercy. Laws must embody both God's heart for justice and His heart for mercy. Throughout the Scriptures, for example, we see a pattern of extending mercy to the repentant. Not removing all consequences, God nonetheless offers mercy to the humble and broken-hearted. It is the heart of the 2 Chronicles 7:14 message: To those who are willing to repent and return to the ways of the Lord, God was willing to show mercy. David also received mercy after repenting of his sins with Bathsheba. If we are to see true biblical justice today, our laws must reflect God's heart of mercy for the humble and broken-hearted. Parole is an excellent example: It does not remove consequences, but does offer mercy.

We need to recognize, however, that **the right weights of justice and mercy are impossible for people to decipher on their own**. David was able to administer justice and righteousness for his people only because he had a relationship with God, the source of justice: "I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do" (Acts 13:22).

David was also willing to listen to counsel from the Lord's shepherds. Though David was not perfect, he ultimately submitted to the counsel of both Samuel and Nathan. If governments are going to reflect this tricky balance, governing authorities must walk with the Lord their God and listen to the timeless voice of the Church: "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers" (Proverbs 11:14).

This incredible balance will also require a great amount of wisdom. When Solomon became king, God told him that he could ask for anything in the world, and God would give it to him. Solomon asked for wisdom: "Give me wisdom and knowledge, that

I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (2 Chronicles 1:10). Solomon knew if he was going to administer true justice and show mercy, he needed wisdom from above.

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you? But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." – Micah 6:8

If the kings of today are to administer justice, as God has called them to, they must walk with the Lord their God, seek counsel and guidance from His Church, and call to Him for the wisdom they need to administer both justice and mercy. If they do this, then their government will be a blessing to its people, and will lead them in the way of righteousness: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 33:12).

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The Timeless Voice: Set apart in a partisan world

Commentary by Greg Baker

Last week I got together with a friend who loves the Lord but sits on the other side of the political aisle from me. To have such a friend has been an answer to prayer, and the goal of our relationship is to spur one another on in Christ.

The relationship started with an effort to find common ground and places we can work together. Our friendship has accomplished both of these things, and so much more. As I have

combed through the Scriptures with this brother in the Lord and heard his thoughts on different issues, I have been challenged to search even deeper through the Scriptures to find God's answers and not my own. At times God's answers are not always the most convenient, but they are the truth.

This relationship, along with others like it, has also changed the way I view politics. It has brought to light this verse: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). It has taught me that we as Christians must not build our worldview of government on theories and worldly philosophies. Rather than conforming to labels like "conservatism" or "liberalism," or any other human ideology, we must allow the Scriptures to determine and define our worldview.

"Your Word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). The Word of God is the only universal truth in this world. And it is not conservative or liberal. It is just the Truth. The truth is often inconvenient and constantly challenges our form of thinking. If you are reading the Bible to reinforce the way you are thinking, you are not reading it with the right heart. As believers we should study the Scriptures to better come to the knowledge of who God is, who we are, and what He says is true. We must conform to His way of thinking. He is the source of life (John 6:47-48), which means He and His Word lead to life. "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Anything opposed to His words leads to death.

The Scriptures will constantly challenge our way of thinking and renew our minds, changing us throughout our lives (Romans 12:2; Philippians 1:6). The Word of God is sanctifying us, and making us more and more like Christ. Yet we must be willing to let the Word of God change our minds, even when verses challenge our deeply held beliefs. Scriptures will not always line up with our politics. When that happens, we will be

forced to ask, "Who do we trust, our political ideology or God?"

Republican, Democrat, conservative, and liberal – all of these things are temporary and worldly philosophies. They are perishing, as this world is perishing (1 John 2:17). Presidents come and presidents go, majorities come and majorities go, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. We must never forget this amazing universal truth. God's Word was in existence well before this nation was created, and it will be in existence long after this nation passes. "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the Word of the Lord remains forever" (Isaiah 40:8).

I envision a day when brothers and sisters in the Lord from all different political beliefs sit down together and study the Word of God. Yet what will bring us together is not a simple commitment to bipartisanship; we must work together in the Lord, to seek a common truth, His Word. "Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Philippians 2:2). We must go beyond seeking common ground. We must find out what is actually true. Conservative and liberal leaning Christians must work together to find where God stands on an issue and conform to that. That is where unity is found. That is our "same mind," the universal truth of God's Word. We must not be governed by conservatism or liberalism, but by the Bible.

Brothers and sisters, in a world that is getting more and more political, where you can't even watch a football game without being confronted with divisive politics, we have an incredible opportunity to be a light. God wants us to look different. He wants us to stand out. And what makes us stand out is not how brightly we shine red or blue, but rather our refusal to conform to the colors of the world.

I encourage you, my brothers and sisters, stand out from the world in the arena of civics. Don't identify with the world's

factions. Build your ideology on the truths in the Scriptures, and work to conform every thought and belief to the Word of God, including your political beliefs. If you do this, you will not only be unique, but you will be a true light in a dark and perishing world (1 John 2:17).

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The Timeless Voice: Why government needs the Church

Commentary by Greg Baker

Throughout history, and throughout the Scriptures, the unique relationship between the shepherds of God's institutions – government and the Church – has been vital to society's success. In fact, the government needs the Church to fulfill its biblical role. For the Church represents a voice not swayed by cultural trends, but rather standing for the timeless truths of the Scriptures, no matter how the culture tugs on government.

One of Scripture's most revealing examples is the relationship between King David and the prophet of the Lord, Nathan. King David is remembered as one of Israel's best kings, described as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). In fact, it is through the lineage of David that Christ now reigns.

David's reign, however, was far from perfect.

King David suffered several dark periods, including a time when he committed adultery and murder. When other kings led

their nations into war, willing to fight and even die for their people (as David had done in his younger days), David decided to stay at home and let others die for him. He esteemed his life and time more important than the people he was supposed to be serving. And while his men were at war without him, David saw the lovely Bathsheba and took her as his own. When her husband (one of David's soldiers at war) got in his way, David had him killed. David's reign had become not only selfish, but tyrannical.

Then the prophet Nathan enters the stage. The shepherd of the Lord, risking his life, stepped into David's palace and corrected the king. As the timeless voice, he called King David out for doing wrong.

But what if Nathan had never approached David? What would have happened? Perhaps we would not be reading David's Psalms today. The books of Samuel, chronicling David's life, would look very different. The lineage of Christ may have even looked different. But thank God for Nathan. Thank God the timeless voice did its job.

Nathan and David, however, are not a unique outlier. Again and again the timeless voice rose to speak to the kings of old. Joseph and Moses stood before the pharaohs of their day. The prophet Daniel interacted in the lives of four different emperors. Even in the New Testament, John the Baptist stood before King Herod and Paul before Caesar himself.

Contrary to what many would like to believe, government is not an institution of this world. It is an institution of God's, with the purpose to punish evil and reward good (1 Peter 2). Those who serve in it are called the Lord's ministers (Romans 13). It is God's institution of justice, and when government does its job well, it is a blessing to its people.

Yet government cannot be a blessing to its people, cannot be an institution of justice, rightly parsing right from wrong,

if it's left unanchored to sway with every current of culture or popular opinion. It needs the counsel of the Church, the timeless voice.

Throughout the Scriptures, kings wise enough to listen to the timeless voice prospered. Those that didn't, didn't. Egypt's pharaoh during the times of Joseph listened, and Egypt was blessed. But the pharaoh of Moses's day did not listen, and the great Egyptian empire was brought to its knees.

God established our social institutions, government among them, but the Church is perhaps the most unique. With Jesus Christ as its head, the Church is the only source of absolute truth in an ever-changing world. That is why God designed government and the church to work together. Government needs the counsel of the Church to determine good from evil. Without the Church, government has to find answers from the world, and apart from the truth, many ways seem right to a person, but in the end they lead to death (Proverbs 14:12).

As the Church, therefore, we must engage the government by being the timeless voice of truth God has called us to be. Our government and nation, as well as all nations of the world, depend on it.

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In a “Timeless Voice,” the Church speaks to government

Commentary by Greg Baker

I believe that God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of Him (1 Timothy 2:4). That means people from all political parties and ideologies, and even those who serve as elected officials.

But how do we carry that message, that desire of God's heart, into the halls of government?

1 Corinthians 9 gives us an answer in the form of a model: As Paul ministered to both Jew and Gentile, we must seek to tear down partisan walls to minister to both Republican and Democrat. Paul may have changed the way he communicated (1 Corinthians 9:20-22), but nowhere did Paul compromise or change his message. We have to do the same.

If we are to be a light to all aspects of our culture, including government, the Lord's people must engage in culture in a biblical way (Matthew 5:16).

I further believe the political/partisan war in this nation can come to an end, but it will only be done through the healing power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our governing authorities don't need a political change, they need a heart change, and only the gospel has the power to do it.

That is why I have begun writing this new column called "The Timeless Voice," with the goal of equipping believers to engage in civics in a biblical way by highlighting a biblical perspective towards current events, political worldviews, and history. Rather than looking through the perspective of worldly institutions, the column asks how we as believers can renew our minds to see how God views these things – and then use that understanding to bring Him glory by speaking Truth, not politics, into the culture.

Check out the first two columns:

["A challenge to the head of state"](#)

["Who's the real enemy?"](#)

The Church has been a timeless voice to the culture throughout history. Though culture constantly changes, the Word of God never does. Just as Joseph and Moses advised Egypt, as Daniel advised Babylon, as Elijah advised Ahab, as Nathan advised David, and as Paul advised Rome, the culture today needs the Church to be that timeless voice – that rock that stands for the Truth, no matter what direction the culture is going.

The timeless voice is not a voice from this kingdom. It is not Republican or Democrat, nor conservative or liberal. No, the timeless voice doesn't even come from this world; it comes from a completely other kingdom. The timeless voice represents the God who created the heavens and the earth, and it stands for the same truths it always has. It must never be shaken, and it must never change. That voice is what is needed in America today.

America needs the Church to be who God has called them to be: His ambassadors to the people of the world ... the timeless voice.

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Timeless Voice: Who's the real enemy?

Commentary by Greg Baker

A great, partisan divide is consuming America. As soon as one election gets over, the next has already begun. There is little time for coming together after an election, and with Washington, D.C., in constant campaign mode, very little is

actually getting done.

Many Christians have been dragged into this partisan battle as well and have picked their preferred side and drawn their battle lines.

But is it the right battle?

I believe our nation cannot heal and truly move forward until God's people lift their eyes out of the trenches and look at the world instead through an eternal perspective: when the Church calls out the *real* enemy and begins to fight where the *real* battle lines are.

In this world, we do have an enemy, and it is not the person or political party that disagrees with us. Our real enemy is Satan. A liar and thief from the very beginning, Satan has declared war on the saints and on the work of our Father. Against God's work of reconciliation, Satan has fostered division. Against healing, sickness. Against love, hate.

And to combat Satan's work, we must know what his work is. His work begins with lies that result in captivity and end in death and eternal separation from God. In the beginning, Satan used lies to deceive Adam and Eve, which led to rebellion against God, which ushered sin into the world, which took people captive, which led to death.

Yet Jesus came to undo the devil's work: "The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil's works" (1 John 3:8).

When Jesus came into this world, He attacked the very root of Satan's work, lies, by testifying the Truth. Then he destroyed Satan's second work, sin, by paying its penalty on the Cross. Finally, Jesus conquered Satan's last work, death, by resurrecting from the dead on the third day.

And Jesus summed up his efforts in a sermon at Capernaum, by

quoting from Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord God is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners.” – Isaiah 61:1

Christ came and died for sinners like you and me. He exposed that man was not the enemy, but rather the captive – captive to lies, sin, death, and under the dominion of the evil one. Jesus rescued us from the dominion of darkness, and brought us into the dominion of the light.

As believers, if we truly want to change the world, we must engage in our Savior’s work, destroying the devil’s schemes. This is where the real battle lines are. Not R vs. D, but rather darkness vs. light.

“I now send you to them to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that by faith in Me they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified.” – Acts 26:17-18.

We must proclaim the Truth Jesus taught us. We must share the Truth that has the power to set people free. We must proclaim what Jesus did on that Cross, and how He defeated death. We, ourselves, cannot overcome the world, but we don’t have to. Jesus did (John 16:33).

We are told America is divided into two political parties, two ideologies. But the real divide is not Republican vs. Democrat or liberal vs. conservative. It’s not even political. The real divide is spiritual. Either we will labor for this world, which is under the dominion of Satan, or we will join our Heavenly Father and labor for the next world, the Kingdom of Light.

God has called us to witness this powerful message to all

people, including people on the left and the right. Both sides need salvation, as all people fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Darkness and light have nothing in common. This nation will only find unity when it labors in the light. Christians will only find success when they pull people from the darkness into the light.

Our nation can come together and heal from this partisan divide. We can find answers that can truly help people. We may not always agree, but if we earnestly seek Him, we will find Him and begin to heal. Christ always has been and always will be our answer.

So what are your goals in your ministry in the civic arena? Is it to get people to vote like you to make sure your side wins? Or is it to proclaim liberty to the captives, to heal the brokenhearted, and bring good news to the poor? Stop building an earthly political kingdom, and labor to pull people from darkness into the light. Fight the real enemy. The real battle. And then, and only then, will we begin to see healing and victory.

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[Click here](#) to read another "Timeless Voice" column from Greg Baker.

Timeless Voice: A challenge to the head of state

Commentary by Greg Baker

In his speech to the nation from Washington, D.C., on Monday, President Trump began by addressing the unhealthy spiritual climate of our nation. In an area the president has fallen short before, highlighted by recent events in Charlottesville, the president came across as the head of state we need him to be. He rose above the divide and called us to a higher standard. America needs to see more of this.

These past few months have reminded us that there is so much more to the presidency than being the commander of the world's most powerful military, than being the chief executive of a multi-trillion dollar government. Presidents are the symbol of a nation. They are the national voice, image, and example. They are the *head of state*.

Unlike public policy that can be spearheaded by Congress, or military strategy that can be directed by the Joint Chiefs, or even the duties of chief executive that can be directed by cabinet secretaries, the head of state can only be fulfilled by one individual: the president. It cannot be delegated. It is not limited to official acts, but encompasses the president's personal life. If the president fails to fulfill it, the nation will suffer.

For the head of state serves as a national role model, representing what a nation should be, rather than what it is. His or her example sets the tone for an entire nation, which is why a righteous head of state must rise above common politics and speak a greater vision to the people. Ultimately, heads of state do one of two things: They either lead their nations closer to God ... or farther from Him.

As we try to understand the unique role of the head of state, we must look at the designer and builder of the institution of government, God. God is a shepherd, and He has placed shepherds throughout His creation. The shepherd of government is the head of state.

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” – 1 Peter 5:2-4.

America’s current spiritual climate would be challenging to any head of state, and no president in these times can be blind to his or her role as an example. The divisions in our nation are becoming wider, pitting Americans against one another over faith, race, social economic status, political beliefs, and more. Darkness and light are clashing before our eyes.

America needs its head of state to rise above these issues, and put aside partisan bickering. America needs a head of state who can cast a vision of a greater America and live out that vision by example. America needs a head of state who leads people back to God. America, therefore, needs President Donald Trump to rise to the office he now holds, and begin being the head of state God has called him to be.

Many heads of state have provided President Trump an example. Abraham Lincoln called America to a higher standard and greater vision in the midst of a civil war. In the Book of Jonah, Nineveh’s king repented in ashes for both his and his nation’s sins, and God relented from judgement. During World War II, King George VI exemplified the humble, positive, and gracious demeanor of a servant that guided Britain in its hour of difficulty.

The Church in America needs to pray for, encourage, and guide our president in this role. President Trump must rise above the divisive politics, rather than keep adding to it. If he doesn’t ... our nation will continue to divide more and more, and his legacy will be tied to it. Mr. President, be who you

were called to be. Be the head of state.

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