

The Timeless Voice: Politics are not our gospel

Commentary by Greg Baker

Politics, by its nature, builds partnerships and tribes, bands of brothers who rally around a common cause. But for the believer, if we are not careful, politics can become a counterfeit of our true partnership in the gospel, a counterfeit that robs us of the life Christ has for us.

A few weeks ago, I went on an annual excursion with guys from my church that we call the “dudes’ trip.” It is always a time of fun and encouragement. On this particular dudes’ trip, we wanted to focus on true Christian fellowship, what Paul described in Philippians as a being “partners in the gospel” with one another.

For true Christian fellowship builds something more than friendships. Partners in the gospel share way more than common interests. They become a band of brothers, war buddies in a larger, spiritual battle. Paul and Silas, Paul and Timothy, Peter and John are all examples of partners in the gospel. They were a band of brothers forged by laboring in the trenches, shoulder to shoulder, for the lives of the saints and the lost.

Partners in the gospel are marked by their love for one another (John 13:35) and their heart for others. They warn those who are idle, and they help those who are weak. They go into the lost world and labor to bring souls to Christ. They go to war against the forces of darkness, and bring the light. They cry and mourn together. They celebrate together. And more.

This is what my wife and I hunger for in the “community” group from church that meets in our home. We want more than friends

who come together periodically to read the Bible and go to services on Sunday. We want more than friends with a common interest. We truly want this partnership, and the only way we are going to get it is if we quit talking about the Great Commission, and actually go out and live it.

Politics, too, can build a band of brothers. Politics is very much a contact sport, a battle that brings people close together. For the believer, however, if we are not careful, the partisan and political divide can be confused with the "partnership in the gospel" the Bible describes. We can mistake our fervor for policy and influence with our mission to be ambassadors for a higher Kingdom. And we can confuse our political war buddies with our truer brothers in Christ.

The distinction can be difficult to discern, because our political goals are often inspired by our Christian values. It is not wrong to desire to bring justice and to defend the oppressed. It is not wrong to take up the widows' and the orphans' cause. These desires spring from a biblical worldview and a heart for people.

Where things often go wrong, however, is our priorities. The first misstep is when our focus on the policy makes the policy itself the end goal, rather than spiritual transformation. And when policy is the end goal, we can slip into thinking those who share our politics have allied with the side of light, while those who disagree have allied with darkness. Our ideology becomes our gospel, and converting others to our politics takes on religious fervor. And when ideology becomes your gospel, anyone who labors with you becomes your band of brothers, your war buddies, your "partner in the gospel." It's just the wrong gospel.

If we do not guard ourselves from this, we will give our entire lives to fighting a political battle and miss where the real battle is fought. We can neglect to encourage and build into the saints. We can neglect to witness and win the lost to

Christ. As a result, we will not raise up disciples. And the net result will be we lose the “culture war” we thought we were fighting, because without Christ and His Great Commission, we will lose the culture.

Our greatest protection against this temptation is to remain grounded in the local church. The local church, not political parties or policy organizations, is the hope for the world. The local church is who has been commissioned to raise up disciples. If we give our lives to building Christ’s Church and keeping our focus on Kingdom work, we will discover our truest band of brothers, our partners in the gospel.

And here’s the revolutionary, long-term perspective: When we band together with partners in the gospel, under Christ, we will see people transform around us. We will see people’s lives change. And as lives change, they change the community around them. What’s more, if we apply this gospel-centric, life-changing, disciple-making perspective to our civic engagement, it can revolutionize our government. Revolutionize how we interact with government officials. And revolutionize how we treat both our political allies and our political foes.

So, each of us – especially those of us active in government and politics – must ask ourselves, “Do I truly have partners in the gospel? And am banding with them to build Christ’s Kingdom and His Church?” Because your true partners in the gospel are your best defense against partnering in the wrong gospel.

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