

Q&A: Why Are Christians so Political?

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(Based on my eBook [*The Christ Follower's New Clothes*](#))

Excited to start this new Q&A series. The concept is to answer questions about Christians, from the point of view of people who aren't into Jesus. So we thought we'd start with an "easy" one ;-)

"Why are Christians so Political?"

First of all, I want to make it clear, that we VALUE and RESPECT people who hold political office. People here locally and nationally.

Because people serve and hold political office, we have amazing living conditions, opportunities and amenities in this country.

So to people who hold office and serve, I want to say THANK YOU. Thank you for running and managing all kinds of things that the rest of us take for granted.

(SELAH)

The crux of this talk is about how people who profess to follow Jesus, should handle themselves, specifically in regard to politics.

Again today's questions is: Why Are Christians so Political?

The historical answer to that goes back to 1979 when Reverend Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority.

It was a political lobby based on:

- pro-family
- pro-life
- pro-defense
- pro-Israel.

Falwell and this group in essence urged Christians to mobilize politically and to embrace politics like never before.

And it worked. This is largely why today Christians are deeply entrenched in politics and putting the Christian banner on candidates.

And bears mentioning that this is something that Billy Graham eventually criticized Falwell for "sermonizing" political issues.

So my first answer to "Why are Christians so political?" Is that a man led a movement to entangle Christianity with politics, it caught steam, and here we are. That's the quick historical answer.

The more profound answer that we'll hang out on today is this:

Why Are Christians so Political?

Because we wrongly believe Jesus wants us to be.

That may shock you. You may not agree with that statement. So I want to spend the rest of our time backing up that statement.

((Pray for openness...))

A phrase I want to use throughout this talk is "*the way of Jesus.*" That was the first phrase for *Christians*; it comes from Act 9:2 where Paul first refers to Christ followers as "*followers of the Way.*"

And this is important because we're more of a "what" people, than a "way" people:

We want to know what's right, what's wrong. What is sin. What is Godly.

Just tell me what to do.

Following Jesus? Ok-what do I need to do?

But following Jesus is a WAY of life. When we follow Jesus, it's not just about WHAT we do--- the WAY we do it, makes it or breaks it.

And this is where we start to have problems. Because we want to say things like,

"Hey, what's right is right and I'm going to do whatever I can politically, however I need to do it, to stop _____ in America!"

What would you put in that blank?:

gay marriage

abortion

Liberals, conservatives

Teaching of evolution

Nothing?

And Jesus may have things to say about those things going on in America, but God says that if we do the right thing the wrong way, it's WRONG.

"If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries

and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, 'Jump,' and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love."

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 The Message

Did you catch how extreme that passage is?

Speaking with the eloquence of angels doesn't count...
Revealing all the mysteries of God and His Word doesn't count...
Having enough faith to make a mountain jump doesn't count...
Giving everything I own to the poor doesn't count...
Giving myself to be burned alive as a martyr for Christ doesn't count...
unless *how* we do it is *loving!* Wow.

So the question for people following the way of Jesus is,
can we fight against societal ills in a political manner,
while loving those we're fighting against?

Let's answer that by contextualizing 1 Corinthians 13:1-3:

*"If I fight gay marriage, but I do not love homosexuals, I've gotten nowhere.
If I fight the misguided ways of the (Democratic, Republican.) political party without love,
I am as useful as a clanging gong—I am spiritually bankrupt."*

When we act politically (face-to-face, FB, Twitter), we are embracing the tactics and the spirit of that party; which includes:

winning at any cost,
mud-slinging,
spinning quotes out of context,
speaking ill of people, and the like.

I'm talking about ALL political parties. (equal opportunity offender!)

NOTES

The way of politics is a FIGHT by any means necessary.

The way of Jesus says that any means other than LOVING actions are wrong.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

The problem with our biblical views of, say homosexual behavior, is that we express it in a political dogma. That is, we embrace a ministry of condemnation. We are condemners.

Like the world of politics, we become finger-pointers. Said another way, we're known for what we're against, which is not very 1 Corinthians 13 of us.

Politics pulls us to join its condemning ways--so we say things like.
"People who practice abortion and homosexuality are wrong and bad."

Jesus doesn't give us the ministry of condemnation. Jesus does not call us to be finger-pointers.

Instead, Jesus gives us (*quite different*) the ministry of reconciliation:

"And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ."

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 NLT

The ministry of reconciliation is paramount and central to our faith.
It is about bringing people into the fold.
It's about offering grace.
It is about walking and talking (FBing, Tweeting) in Christ-like ways.

An ambassador acts in ways in keeping with the one they represent.

So to be an ambassador for Christ and *not* talk and interact like Jesus...
To be an ambassador but have a life that looks & sounds like Fox News or MSNBC is to be a horrible ambassador for Jesus!

This is messy:

God's teaching says that the practice of homosexuality is a sin.
And it is just as much a sin to be at war with people who practice homosexuality.

The way of politics is simple: black and white. Point out the wrong and proceed against it.
Gay is wrong, so condemn them, fight them, legislate against them.

The way of Christ is messy--but BETTER:

The practice of homosexuality is sin. But ours is to love people—all people. Don't fight them; love them. Reconcile ALL people to Christ--be ambassadors for Christ. Let only God judge.

NOTES

CONDEMNATION is the way of politics.

RECONCILIATION is the way of Jesus. *2 Corinthians 5:18-21*

(SELEH)

Within the 66 books of the Bible, there is one commandment at the top of the list:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Matthew 22:36-39 NIV

So let’s get this straight. There are in essence two equally *greatest* commandments:
love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

What if our neighbor is:

- gay?
- liberal?
- conservative?
- Islamic?
- a Fox News / MSNBC fan?
- an Obama-lover?
- a George H./W. Bush fanatic?
- a mime?

Jesus said, love them. Jesus didn’t say love your neighbor *unless...*

So we’re stuck. We *are* **COMMANDED** to love our all-inclusive neighbor if we want to live in the way of Jesus.

Another *great* of Scripture is Jesus’ parting charge to us. It’s called The *Great* Commission.

“Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: ‘God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.’”

Matthew 28:18-20 The Message

So let’s be clear:

All followers of Jesus are charged with sharing the way of Christ with EVERYONE.

Seriously, *everyone*?

Even the people we don't like?

Even the people who watch and are on MSNBC and Fox News?

The people we were rallying against last week?

That's radical. That's the way of Jesus.

Again, the 2 *greats* from Jesus' mouth:

- 1) We are to love our neighbor, whoever he/she is regardless of his/her jacked-up beliefs and lifestyles.
- 2) We are to share the way of Jesus with all people.

Here's some interesting data that may, in fact, wreak havoc on those two *greats*. In the last three national elections, the popular vote was pretty close to 50% for each candidate.

Popular vote since 2000:

2008

52.9% Democrat
47.1% Republican

2004

49.3% Democrat
50.7% Republican

2000

48.4% Democrat
47.9% Republican

Want to guess what the polls are for our 2012 election?

Even money. 50-50.

So in the last twelve years, out of every ten people, five vote Democrat and five vote Republican.

I'm not great at story problems, but it seems to me that taking a vocal political stand conversationally, in social media, etc. is to reduce our effectiveness and influence in the *greats* of Jesus' teachings by *one half!*

We need to catch this, friends!

In a world that God calls us to reconcile to Him—*when we spout off politically-- we are turning off half of the people we're COMMANDED to influence and love in the name of Jesus Christ!*

We get this right? No one on the opposite side of the political isle reads our political FB post or Tweet and says,

"Ooooh, how could I have been so blind? Since I read that I'm going to be a Republican/Democrat!" (Has that EVER happened?)

When you read political posts & tweets from people on the opposite side--do you feel attracted to that person? Or repelled?...

Friends, every time we waive our political banner, we willfully REDUCE our effectiveness in reaching HALF of our world for Christ.

And when we care more for electing a president than we do for the Great Commission, we have chosen the way of politics over the way of Jesus. We become followers of a party, but just fans of Jesus.

(SELAH)

The nature of politics is division.

It's two polar-opposite sides, just like we saw in the election results a minute ago. It's SIDES. It's dividing people. Right?

The way of Jesus is NOT division:

"There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 3:28 NLT

That verse says we are ONE.

Politics require there to be SIDES.

How do we get in bed with politics that requires sides,
and follow the way of Jesus that says there are no sides?

In the way of Jesus there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female, Democrat and Republican.

The way of Jesus is unity; togetherness.

Let us not be so foolish as to think that unity within our political party is enough. There are Christ followers in every political party.

When we break our unity in Christ, in lieu of our politics, we have elevated our politics over our faith. And that is evil.

And our radical God calls us to MORE than unity:

“...may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows.”

1 Thessalonians 3:12 NLT

Our love, not just for fellow Christ followers, but for *all* people?

When did we ever feel a sense of love for all people:

while watching MSNBC or Fox News?
at a political rally?
talking politics at the water cooler?
watching a presidential debate?
sharing our position on gay marriage or abortion?

NOTES

The way of politics is DIVISION.

The way of Jesus is UNITY. *Galatians 3:28*

(SELAH)

Politics revolves around the concept of defeating an enemy.

An enemy to our way of life.

An enemy that's ruining our "Christian" nation.

An enemy that is democrat, republican, libertarian.

Politics is a fight & we fight against enemies.

We don't naturally think in terms of "enemies," but politics and cable news have bred this enemy-centric way of thinking into our culture. So we think it's normal & ok.

To get some perspective on what an enemy really is, let's re-examine the context in which Jesus lived:

Imagine if in America, a larger more powerful nation subdued and occupied our entire country. Foreigners ran the country from the highest office to the local police chief and officers.

Imagine that this conquering nation solicited Americans in each of our communities to extort a ridiculous amount of taxes from us, and they skimmed some of all they got. And all of our taxes went to the occupying nation.

This conquering country controlled everything from the monetary system, courts, internet, television, movies, free speech, highways, everything.

Imagine that Americans convicted of crimes, determined by this occupying nation, were nailed naked on tall sign posts along the streets in our cities, maybe even in front of your home. They hung there sometimes for days until they finally died.

This is what is what like where Jesus lived: occupied by Rome. Now, in this context, let's read Jesus' words:

"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:43-48 NLT

Jesus' teaching is so extreme, it needs no metaphor. He said, "love your enemies," in the real life context of brutal godless occupiers.

And we somehow think that the face of our "enemy" is Rachel Maddow or Sean Hannity.

We are being lured into an enemy-centric political culture while living a faith that is supposed to *love and interact with our enemies*.

I love the old quote that *Wayne's World* made trivial,

"Once you label me you negate me." -Søren Kierkegaard

This means that when we label people we remove their individuality. We reduce them to something less than they are.

This is very convenient in an enemy-centric culture. If I view people as my enemy, it helps if the label I put on them dehumanizes them a little.

It's easier to take a stand against people Jesus died for if they are more of an idea than a fellow human.

It's like we have a virtual DYMO label machine in our mind that prints out sticky labels with words like:

- liberal,
- conservative,
- homosexual
- Muslim
- Pro-abortion

Those labels make it easier for us to see them as our enemies. That is the way of politics.

One of the hideous side effects of seeing people as enemies is that we get to feel a little bit superior.

With enemies come sides, which means we must be on the *right* side.

(Did anyone ever think they were on the wrong side?)

This conveniently makes us right and them wrong.

That's the opposite of humility.

By the way, Jesus is pretty keen on the idea of humility.

**"...Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves."
Philippians 2:3 NLT**

(Ever had a political discussion & thought of the other side as "better than yourself?")

An enemy-centric paradigm is war terminology. In war, you defeat someone so that you can have your way.

If you win the war, you do not assimilate the defeated into your ranks; that would be insane.

You disarm them and send them home with a promise to play nice in the future. You then keep an eye on them. After all, you can't trust your enemy, even after a truce.

The way of Jesus is the opposite of war terminology.

The way of Jesus graciously and lovingly engages *people*, not enemies. And hopefully, through relationship, that person becomes "assimilated" by grace into the way of Jesus. Then, these would-be "enemies" become as close to us as a brother or sister.

When we get sucked into the political paradigm of seeing people as enemies, we can no longer see opportunities the Holy Spirit wants us to see. Opportunities to befriend someone with whom we disagree. Opportunities to love and share our faith.

Remember, Jesus wants to use us to reconcile *everyone*.

Everyone, enemy included, is an opportunity for us to shower with the loving grace of Jesus Christ.

"Use your heads as you live and work among outsiders. Don't miss a trick. Make the most of every opportunity. Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out."

Colossians 4:5-6 The Message

When we watch Fox News or MSNBC and let the pot-stirring pundits work us into a hot lather, and then politically interact with the world, we're doing the opposite of Colossians 4.

When we spew our Fox News and MSNBC-like political venom in social media, we're doing the opposite of Colossians 4.

Our enemies--the people we disagree with--the people we don't like: according to God, our Colossians 4 response to them should be:

"gracious words,
to bring out their best as we talk with them,
not to put them down, not to cut them out."

The hope of this world is not in any cable news show or political party.
The hope of this world lies in God working through us, one relational opportunity at a time, as we build bridges with people that politics says are our enemies.

NOTES

The way of politics is ENEMIES .

The way of Jesus is OPPORTUNITIES . *Matthew 22:36-39; 28:18-20*

(SELAH)

Let's say you put a sign in your yard that says, *"I am for heterosexual marriage. Gay marriage should not be allowed."*

And just for good measure, you put a cross or a Jesus fish on it too.

Now let's say your neighbor across the street and his male life partner see your sign.

Allow me to eloquently sum up the result of said sign: So?

Everyone who drives by your house and agrees with you will say to themselves, "Me too!"

People who don't agree with you will probably just shake their head and think you're a dork.

When we put a sign in our yard, we're stating a position.

Politics (and Christians) LOVE positions.

We LOVE to tell people where we stand on issues.

And we even feel like we're doing the God-honoring thing when we proclaim our positions. As if stating a position really helped anyone.

Let me explain:

A couple months ago, Joel Larison posted on Facebook:

"Why do so many Christians have so much more trouble with a person enjoying a beer than they do a person pounding fast food?"

Take a guess on what followed?

Lots of positions, either for or against alcohol. And this is the essence of the futility of the political model: it's about our position.

Every time we feel like stating a position, imagine someone saying, "So..." because that's the net effect of a position.

Stating a position simply tells the world which side you're on, which reinforces our enemy and war paradigms.

Stating a position divides. It's the nature of positions.

Stating a position either pulls us in, because we share the position or it pushes us away, because we have less in common.

Positions are discussion killers. Why?

Because we know that if someone has declared a side, there's nothing anyone can say that will change his/her mind.

This is why we hate politics! We know that the two sides are diametrically opposed and nothing said by one side will do anything to change the other. It's a stalemate.

Ironically, we Christ followers embrace the same futile model.

We are no less positional. That's why everyone says,

"Never bring up religion or politics at a cocktail party."

Our love of positions is why we put signs in our yard; if they're not physical, they're virtual.

Signs in our conversations,

signs on the backs of our cars,

links, pictures and memes on Twitter and Facebook.

It's never been easier to know what we are for and against.

Proclaiming our positions has done nothing to attract people who don't yet embrace Jesus. And sadly, it has made the Church nothing more than a political movement in the eyes of the unchurched.

So if not signs and positions, then what?

Let's go back to Joel's Facebook question.

"Why do so many Christians have so much more trouble with a person enjoying a beer than they do a person pounding fast food?"

My reply to his posts was, *"What are your stories of alcohol?"*

Stating a position puts us into a war paradigm.

But asking about someone's story puts us into a *relational* paradigm.

It's one thing to take a position on alcohol. It's another to hear the horrors of a woman whose husband destroyed their family because of his abusive alcoholism.

It's one thing to take a position on alcohol. It's another to hear the true stories of Christ followers who frequented a local pub, drank beer publicly-- so they could sincerely befriend people who weren't into Jesus, only to see the pub manager and his family walk into church one Sunday.

Positions make alcohol right or wrong.
Those two stories tell us alcohol is right *and* wrong.
Politics is about positions. The way of Jesus runs through stories.

Positions are like road signs:
We get it instantly,
it's a boring read,
and there's nothing to discuss.

Stories are magnetic.
Command us to listen.
Spark us to ask questions.
Stories break through stereotypes and positional walls.
Stories create relational connections.
God works through relational connections.

As much as positions push us apart, stories pull us together.
Stories connect us with people we thought we had nothing in common with.

We are not Christ's ambassadors through our signs and positions.
We are ambassadors only if we are like Jesus, interacting with ALL people through stories and relationships.

All through the Bible, God is relationally interacting with and redeeming this world. It is what He does and how He does it. Jesus incarnates the world through your relationships. My relationships.

A political paradigm tells us to take a position. Draw a line and hold it.

The way of Jesus tells us to walk across the street to the same-sex life partners and listen to their story.

The way of Jesus tells us to cross lines; ask about the stories of people whose positions we hate.

Jesus was accused by the religious of being a glutton and a drunk! (**Matthew 11:19**).
Why?

He got close enough to people the Pharisees took positions against, so he could hear their stories and so that they could hear his.

If Jesus had taken a position on certain types of people-- Jesus could never have been accused of being a drunk and a glutton because He wouldn't have interacted with guys that liked to party.

Jesus doesn't draw lines; He crosses them.

Jesus hung out at cocktail parties. Because that's how Jesus incarnates the world; through relationships that generate church gossip.

Positions will keep us safe.

Safely away from gay people, liberals, conservatives, people involved with abortion. People who have stories that we can relate with.

People that we could love if we only had the courage to crawl out from behind our position.

NOTES

The way of politics is POSITIONAL.

The way of Jesus is RELATIONAL. *The Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John*

(SELAH)

Here's the thing about being a follower of Jesus:

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The way of Jesus should SUPERSEDE everything.

Supersede means "to displace in favor of another." So that means Jesus and His ways should always be *first* in our life.

That means that if we're known for our political zeal more than our zeal for Jesus, there's a problem.

Jesus does not have a political party.

Jesus has a Kingdom and a way of life that He's calling us to--a way of living like Jesus that supersedes everything in our life--including politics.

Jesus is calling us to be loving and attractive in word and deed to:

democrats,
republicans,
libertarians,

people who practice homosexuality,
people who are pro-abortion,
Muslims, everyone.

The way of Jesus supersedes everything. That means our HOPE for everything: our family, country and president---should rest fully in Jesus.

Are you trusting fully in Jesus in this election?...

Do you worry that if someone gets elected that somehow God can't do everything He wants to do in this world?

Do you think God needs political help?

Is your faith a little divided between Jesus and our political system?

"...be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do."

James 1:6-8 NLT

God wants all of our loyalty.

God wants all of our faith in Him--not in a party, not in a candidate.

James 1:6-8 says that the Way of Jesus supersedes everything.

Let's listen to a song that defines God. Not in a political sense, not in a cultural sense, not in an American sense. But in a boldly biblical sense. Listen to these words... (childlike imagery--childlike faith)

<<< song w/video support: [God is Not a White Man - Gungor](#) >>>

Listen...

NOTES

God doesn't have a PARTY or a candidate.

God has a Kingdom and ambassadors.

His Kingdom is not POLITICAL; it is relational.

Jesus died for everyone and is FOR everyone.

(Urge people to pray this daily til election)

"Father, show me how to live out the greatest commandment: to love You with all my heart, soul and mind, and likewise, to love my neighbor as myself. Help me, Lord, to

trust You and You alone to be my hope--hope for my family, my country and my government. Lord, help me to truly love people with whom I disagree. Help me to sincerely pray for our political leaders regardless of who they are. Lord, help me to die to myself daily, to die to my zeal for anything other than You and You alone. Father, impassion me for Your Word, and Your ways. Help me be stirred up for You and Your will for my life.

Lord, may Your love permeate all of my life so that I may be attractive to all people, especially those with whom I disagree. Help me, Father, to be known as a follower of You, above anything else in my life. Amen."

(Pray out.)