

EDITORIAL: We need to discuss faith & politics

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A reader recently submitted a thoughtful, articulate letter about a set of articles that appeared in this paper. Perhaps you read her letter in the June 11 issue. She wrote, in part:

“I was dismayed to read stories and analysis of the better-known U.S. presidential candidates in a recent issue of the Baptist Standard, even though I didn’t fault the information provided. I’m interested in politics and am a political party member, but I believe in separation of church and state.



“I don’t argue politics at church, and I don’t argue religion at political party meetings. I wouldn’t read a government publication or a party flyer to help me decide whether to be a Christian or which denomination to

join, and I don't read the Standard to help me decide how to vote."

She and I enjoyed a lively, enlightening e-mail exchange, in which she expressed concern about the "slippery slope" of politics and the importance of "holding the line regarding nondiscussion of politics" in her church.

Her concerns are valid, and they are shared by thousands of Christians. We recognize the danger of discussing either politics or religion in "polite" company, and we understand talking about politics and religion can be incendiary. The cover package in this issue of the *Standard* illustrates how difficult it is to walk that razor-thin line of Christian citizenship.

Her letter represents what I believe to be misperceptions about how to live our faith in the political world and express our political convictions among the faithful. Baptists historically have advocated separation of church and state. But separating Christians from politics distorts that heritage. She raises two points. Let's look at both:

- **Politics in the Standard.** The information we offered about faith-related positions of the major presidential candidates was scrupulously nonpartisan. We simply provided facts about candidates' stands on key issues.

As Baptists, we trust individuals to make up their minds on how to vote. But the *Standard* has a responsibility to provide good information so they can make up their minds responsibly. Factual, unbiased material about candidates' views on faith-related issues rarely appears in the secular media. So, we feel a sense of duty to provide news you can't get elsewhere. We'll never endorse a candidate or tell you how to vote, but we would be negligent if we didn't help you get all the information you need to make up your mind.

- **Politics at church.** Sure, politics can be a slippery slope. But people of faith who care about the whole world live on that slope already. Reasoned, balanced reporting gives them traction to get a toehold.

A reason many Christians think only one political viewpoint represents the “Christian” position is because so many churches and church leaders are silent. Consequently, the shrill “religious” voices in the secular media are the only “Christian” messages they hear. So, when strident, self-assured religious leaders tell them there’s only one “Christian” position, they reflexively believe it. However, if they participated in reasoned, measured discussions with friends and people they respect in their own churches, perhaps they would begin to consider other possibilities. While some people vote as they do based strictly upon their religious convictions regarding abortion and homosexuality, many others vote quite differently based upon their religious convictions that Jesus focused more on caring for the poor, welcoming the stranger, and ministering to the sick and the imprisoned than he did talking about sexual behavior. We need to consider both perspectives.

Many Baptists are so scared of disagreeing with each other that they fail to discuss hard but vitally important issues of life in the context of biblical faith. You think Jesus avoided controversy? Absolutely not. Talking about politics at church can be scary and hard. But if we will be open, honest and loving, we can demonstrate not only mature Christian faith, but also model citizenship.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Baptist churches, in Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.