

Editorial: Christians, political lines should not define us

October 3, 2018

I am concerned by Christians allowing political lines to define them, and I think you should be concerned, too.

As followers of Christ, we are to be defined by Jesus and not worldly terms like “conservative” or “progressive.” What I hear, however, are Christians defining one another more by political positions than by spiritual convictions. And I am guilty, too.

While political lines between Christians are nothing new, the division is expressed in particularly acute terms these days. Here are some examples.

Good and godless defined by political position

During a [live interview](#) Sept. 30 on Fox News, Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, spoke about the political battle over Judge Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation to the U.S. Supreme Court and what Democrats fear Kavanaugh will do with *Roe v. Wade* if he is confirmed. Jeffress said: “Conservative Christians see this. They know this is not a battle between Republicans and Democrats. It’s a battle between good and evil—between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness—and that’s why they’re going to turn out in the 2018 mid-terms.”

While Jeffress did say conservative Christians understand the battle is not between political parties, he did equate the conservative side with the good side in the spiritual battle. The not-so-subtle insinuation is that Christians who are not conservative do not “see this” and are thus on the side of evil.

Regardless whether Jeffress is correct, his comments encourage the division of the body of Christ—the church—along political, and thus worldly, lines.

On April 5, Franklin Graham stated in a set of [tweets](#): “Christians should be aware of candidates who call themselves progressive. Progressive is generally just a code word for someone who leans toward socialism, who does not believe in God, & who will likely vote against Godly principles that are so important to our nation.”

Graham made a general reference to candidates instead of a pointed reference to Christians. He also was careful to use modifiers like “generally,” “leans toward” and “likely” rather than employing the bare designations “is” and “are.” Despite Graham’s caution, the insinuation that any professing Christian who takes on the label “progressive” is also “godless” and perhaps not a true Christian encouraged division in the body of Christ along political lines.

During the weeks that followed, Graham’s second tweet was latched onto by [many](#) who took exception to “progressive” being made synonymous with “godless.” At least one person [responded](#) to Graham’s tweet by turning the “godless” designation back onto conservatives: “Christians should be aware of candidates who call themselves conservative. It’s commonly a term used to mask racism, greed and worldly comfort as ‘family values.’ They use the name of God to further an agenda that is not related to The Kingdom.”

While such conservatives and their progressive foes engage in this sparring contest, let’s step back to consider another question: What if neither side is right? What if the good and godly are neither conservative nor progressive nor moderate? What if the defining line is not political at all?

Give to Caesar what is Caesar's & to God what is God's

My concern is not with speaking truth to power—if that actually is what people like Jeffress and Graham are doing. My concern is not about Jeffress and Graham making political comments. My concern is not about their efforts to advance conservative political and religious positions. I refer to them as examples of how Christians give away too much to politics.

My concern is with using worldly terms—the political designators “conservative” and “progressive”—to define who is and who is not a Christian. When we allow worldly terms to define who is and who is not a Christian, we are giving too much to Caesar.

The righteous will live by faith, not politics

Neither side is perfect, and to be fair, neither side makes a bald claim to be. Even so, both sides use one another's flaws to make themselves appear closer to perfection than the other. For Christians who desire to define themselves biblically, such worldly tactics must be abandoned.

For Christians who desire to be defined biblically, the line that defines us is not whether we are conservative, progressive or moderate. The line that defines us is our profession of faith in Jesus Christ and the life we live as a result.

A Christian, in simplest terms, is a person who professes full faith in Jesus as Lord and who seeks to align his or her life according to Jesus' teachings. A non-Christian, in simplest terms, is a person who puts no faith in Jesus and who makes no effort to align his or her life according to Jesus'

teachings.

Perhaps the real irritation is not the definition of “Christian” but is in the fact that many non-Christians do a better job aligning their lives with Jesus’ teachings than do many professing Christians—conservative, progressive or moderate.

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