

Editorial: The ‘downward death spiral’ of hypocrisy

January 28, 2016

Which speaks louder—words or deeds?

This isn't a benign question, particularly this week. The Iowa caucus officially kicks off the 2016 presidential primary season Feb. 1. As Americans prepare to choose a new leader, they will be tempted to say and do all kinds of things. And sometimes, words and deeds contradict each other.



Editor Marv KnoxSuch was the case with one of Texas' most visible pastors, Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Church in Dallas. A week and a half before Iowans would gather to begin the process of picking a president, Jeffress traveled to the Hawkeye State to “not officially endorse” Donald Trump, according to the [Houston Chronicle](#).

“Although as a pastor I cannot officially endorse a candidate, I want you to know I would not be here this morning if I were not absolutely convinced that Donald Trump would make a great president of the United States,” Jeffress told a Trump rally crowd at Dordt College. “Most Americans know we are in a mess, and as they look at Donald Trump, they believe he is the one leader who can reverse the downward death spiral of this nation we love so dearly.”

Eventually, Jeffress introduced Trump to the crowd, calling him “a great leader, a great visionary and a great American.”

Does ‘no’ mean ‘yes’?

So, Jeffress wasn’t endorsing Trump. He just said Trump can walk on political water. To paraphrase a line from an old movie, “His lips said, ‘No, no,’ but his presence said, ‘Yes, yes!’”

And Christians wonder why unbelievers think we’re all a bunch of hypocrites.

Jeffress and other pastors cannot “officially endorse” Trump or any other politician because their churches are tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3). The code allows pastors and churches to address issues of public concern, but it prohibits them from endorsing candidates.

Actually, Jeffress could endorse Trump or any other candidate. But then the Internal Revenue Service could declare First Baptist Dallas in violation of Section 501(c)(3). In addition to the church losing its tax-exempt status, members’ charitable contributions to the church would not be tax-deductible.

The real issue isn’t Trump

The issue isn’t really the Trump endorsement. Jeffress can support whoever he wants. We could engage a long debate about who is qualified to be president and whose liabilities—based on politics, morality, intelligence, experience, wisdom and character—disqualify them.

But the issue is straightforward: It’s problematic for a Christian—particularly a high-profile preacher—to say one thing and do another. Jeffress absolutely endorsed Trump, even if he “officially” denied it. What’s to stop unbelievers from projecting such questionable ethics

upon everything Jeffress says he believes? And since he frequently goes on TV and gets quoted by the media as representing Baptists and other Christians, what's to stop unbelievers from thinking all Baptists and other Christians behave that way?

Unfortunately, we're living through one of the most vitriolic presidential campaigns in memory. America is so divided, even Republicans and Fox News are at odds, and a socialist draws thousands to political rallies.

We'll all be tempted

This means the presidential primaries and the run-up to the general election are going to be harsher and more trying than what we've experienced for years and years. We'll all be tempted to say and do things that do not reflect the Spirit of Christ. Politics isn't worth the risk of ruining Jesus' reputation.

Maybe Jeffress thinks a Trump presidency is worth that risk.

And maybe the "downward death spiral" is pulling on the church more than it's pulling on America.