

Voices: The voices to which we listen

August 15, 2018

One of the defining features of the people of God, according to Jesus in John 10:27, is “my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

The people of God hear the voice of Jesus and follow him. One of the main goals of discipleship in the local church is to give us ears to hear this voice and a heart receptive to following the path of humility, sacrifice and love this voice leads us down.

The problem is Jesus speaks in a still, small voice while many other voices are much louder and call us to follow them. Both of these competing voices are trying to form us into their image.

A crisis of discipleship

We have a crisis of discipleship within the American church. There is no other conclusion we can reach when we see the way hyper-partisan politics has become our idol. Our hearts will be formed by the voices we listen to most. I fear we are listening to the louder voices of cable news much more than we are listening to the voice of Jesus. The danger is we sometimes confuse the two voices.

In many instances, we have allowed the loud voices of talk radio, Facebook feeds and cable news to disciple us more than the word of God. We listen for the opinions of pundits and hosts more than the voice of Jesus. I know because I am guilty of this as much as anyone. I am pulling at the log in my own eye here.

Two voices leading in opposite directions

The voice of hyper-partisan politics calls for us to seek our own interests. The voice of Jesus calls us to “look not only to [your] own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4).

The voice of hyper-partisan politics calls us to see as our enemy those who vote differently. That voice divides the body of Christ as it leads us to question the salvation of anyone who doesn't see things the way we do. The voice of Jesus calls us to love, encourage and build up the body of Christ celebrating our unity in him in the midst of all of our diversity.

The voice of hyper-partisan politics disciplines us to be motivated by fear and anger and convinces us everyone and everything is a threat. The voice of Jesus calls us to love, hope and joy and convinces us everyone is made in the image of God and deserving of the dignity that truth entails.

A political church tuned to the voice of Jesus

The church always will be political in the sense that the church always will be seeking the common good and the kingdom of God in every aspect of their life, but the overtaking of the church and her thinking by deeply partisan politics has been detrimental to the mission and life of the church.

There is room for political difference within the body of Christ. There is freedom for the believer to identify and agree with one party over another within our political system. We should be involved politically in order to seek justice and the good of our city, our state and our country. We will disagree about the best way to go about accomplishing these goals.

I am not advocating apathy toward politics. Form a political opinion based on your reading of Scripture and your own conscience. Vote your conscience, but don't let the idol of hyper-partisan politics convince you everyone else is the enemy. Don't let the idol of hyper-partisan politics lead you away from the love you are called to show to all.

To whose voice will we listen?

Whose voice will we follow?

Who will disciple us?

Before we listen to the voice of talk radio or cable news, may our hearts be tuned to hear the voice of Jesus. May we always follow him and seek first the kingdom of God.

Zac Harrel is pastor of First Baptist Church in Gustine, Texas.