

Voices: Rethinking church and American politics in a fractious election year

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Before Election Day, I was talking with one of my pastors about the 2016 election and what long-term consequences it might have for the church in America. He told me about a political ad he'd seen that ended with the tagline "(Opposing candidate) failed, and now the world is unraveling."

✘ Jake Raabe "How upsetting it must be to be a child or young person who isn't equipped to handle a claim like that," he remarked. He's right. The message from both sides has been the same: If the other candidate is elected, something terrible will happen.

Regardless of the outcome of the election, American Christians need to give serious reflection to the last year and the way we interact with politics in general.

Consider political interaction

The election of 2016 has divided churches, stoked hostility and allowed moral compromise to creep into our way of interacting with the larger culture. Both sides advanced mocking and ridicule. Both sides relativized wrong by claiming to be "not as bad" as the other. And both sides repeatedly failed consistently to uphold the rights and dignity of all persons in all stages of life. In 2016, the church repeatedly succumbed to these temptations from both sides of the political aisle, and the full ramifications of this will not be seen for some time.

Knowing we did a bad job of speaking to our culture in this last year, we ✘

as followers of Christ in the United States must reconsider the way we interact with politics.

If we made any mistake in 2016, it was taking the election too seriously. Like the ad my pastor told me about, both candidates repeatedly advanced a vision of the world that stands in direct contradiction to the Christian gospel.

From the right, we heard the world is moving in a downward spiral to destruction, and the left's candidate would make that movement irreversible. From the left, we heard the world is headed in the right direction but would be halted by the candidate from the right, who would undo the progress the world is making. The two sides differ on the trajectory of the world but make the same claim: The movement of history depends on who is elected president of the United States in 2016.

Non-Christian worldview

The problem with speaking in this way is it presents a worldview separate from that of Christianity. Saying the world is headed for destruction is explicitly the opposite of [what Scripture says](#) the world is headed for. Saying we need a particular human being to save us from destruction is idolatry and mistrust of the living and active God, and I've seen an unfortunate number of Christians on both side of the political spectrum make this claim.

God can work through whoever is Americans elect as president, and claiming otherwise, no matter how much we dislike a candidate, is claiming a limitation on the power of God.

Future decided

The future of the world and the direction of history was decided 2,000 years ago on a hill outside of Jerusalem, when all of the powers of the world

lost their control over humanity. The future of the world is settled; history already is written, and it doesn't look like the picture that any political candidate has ever given us.

Christians must regain this perspective on the direction of the world if we're going to engage our culture in politics in a way that is faithful to the gospel. We as followers of Christ should use every tool at our disposal to demonstrate his reign over the world through the betterment of the lives of all. Unfortunately, though, we far too often mistake the means with the ends and speak as though the history of the world depends on the latest election.

Believe it or not, the world will still be around in 2020, and there will be another election. Christians, let's try to keep it in perspective next time.

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