

Article: JAP707

HOW TO ENGAGE IN POLITICS WITHOUT LOSING YOUR SOUL

This article first appeared in the Viewpoint column of the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 31, number 4 (2008). For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

We in the United States are in a heated presidential election. When the political temperature rises so does name-calling, character assassination, and confrontation. Even committed Christ-followers, unfortunately, get caught up in the partisan political whirlwind of the moment and join in the fight. We as Christians should seriously engage in the ongoing debate in the political public square, but in doing so we must demonstrate a citizenship seasoned by God's wisdom and love.

The title of this article is based on Jesus' question in Mark 8:36, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (NIV). Over the years, I have watched many Christians zealously become active in partisan politics and actually "lose their souls"; that is, they lose their public, uniquely Christian witness, act contrary to the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and become divisive agents within the church.

Biblical Guidelines. Below are ten biblical guidelines to assist Christians to engage in the upcoming presidential election without "losing their souls."

1. *Don't equate the biblical kingdom of God with any human political party or nation.* We must maintain the distinctiveness between God's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. We must never fuse the two (John 18:36; Matt. 6:33).
2. *Don't elevate a politician to messianic status.* People often falsely think a politician can single-handedly produce supernatural social results. We have one Lord, and we must resist any attempt to exalt politicians to unrealistic heights (Matt. 7:15; 1 Pet. 3:15).
3. *Don't just vote, but pray for the leaders of all political parties.* Christians can be tempted to bless the politician of their choice, and curse his or her opponent, but remember, we must pray even for our enemies (1 Tim. 2:1–2; Matt. 5:44).
4. *Don't forget that your ultimate security is in the unshakeable kingdom of God.* Many Christians often elevate the outcome of presidential elections to an apocalyptic status. If a particular presidential candidate does not win, we begin to think or act as if the world will end. In so doing, however, we express an unbelief in the active sovereignty of God over human affairs (Heb. 12:26–29).
5. *Don't bring the polarization of partisan politics into the family of God.* Every Christian has freedom of conscience before God, and we must guard against allowing political perspectives to divide the church (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 1:11–12).
6. *Don't demonize anyone.* Every person has been created in the image of God, and Christians must not demonize or dehumanize other people, whether we agree with them politically or not (Col. 3:8; James 4:12).
7. *Don't engage in angry, hostile confrontation.* Present your political convictions through civil debate and rational dialogue instead. Confrontational arguments demonstrate an ugly pride that demeans Jesus Christ (James 1:19–20; 2 Tim. 2:14).

8. *Don't become so intertwined with one political party that you forfeit your independence.* When you do, you lose your right to be heard and to speak and clarify biblical truth to all politicians and political parties (1 Tim. 3:15; Rom. 3:4).

9. *Don't allow yourself to support attempts to divide races, male and female, rich and poor, or young and old.* Partisan politics often divides society into voting blocks, and separates society instead of uniting it. Christians should function as peacemakers and reconcilers in the public square and should resist every temptation to join the game of dividing people for political gain (Matt. 5:9; 2 Cor. 5:18–19).

10. *Don't simply curse the darkness, but constructively engage it.* The cultural and missional mandate of kingdom Christians is not to curse the darkness in our world, but to act as illuminating light and preserving salt. We must share the light of God's truth and work to maintain the common welfare of our nation by overcoming evil through doing good (Matt. 5:13–16).

I am aware that the outcome of the 2008 presidential election could have significant, and even negative, consequences for people's lives, but we don't need to worry. In the larger scheme of history, no matter who becomes our next president, God is still King, and He is still in control!

— Andrew Jackson