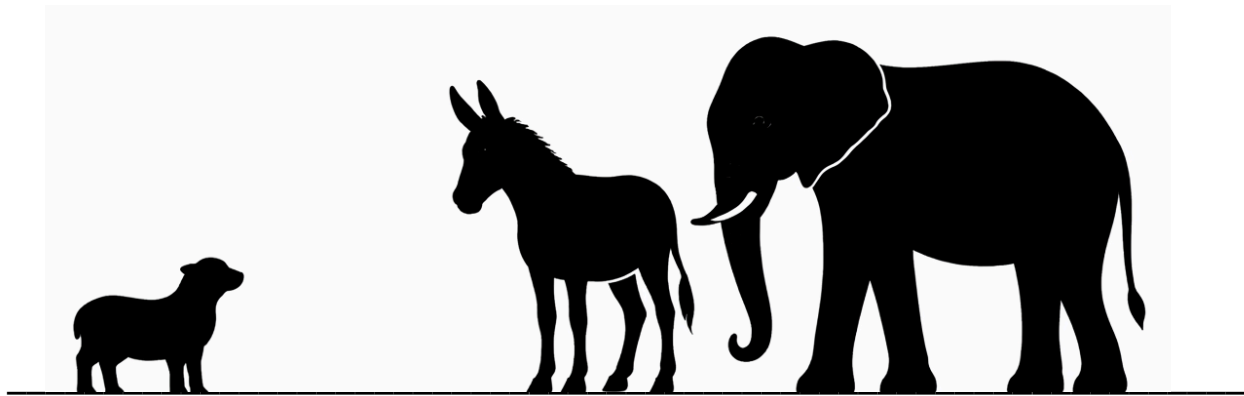


Partisan Piety

~ A Biblical Stance on Political Identity ~



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During conversations with my childhood friends, whose families were mostly Liberal, it was not uncommon for Donald Trump to be referred to as the “Orange Man” and mocked as though he was less than human by my fellow elementary schoolers. This was slightly unsettling to me, even at the time, considering that my playmates most likely knew very little of this man’s actual role in government or effect on the country. At one point, I heard that Donald Trump had literally built a wall *around China* on account of his hatred for women. These children had heard snippets of sentiment from their parents or other adults in their lives and had internalized it as something that connected them to their family and friends. The hatred of an entire political party, and by extension a man whom they had never met, was how they connected with each other.

According to Google Search Trends, the search term “Donald Trump” was five times more likely to be searched than “Jesus” in 2025.¹ This is an illustration of the relevance of politics relative to religion in current-day Western culture. American politics have become extremely polarizing and often hostile, especially in recent years. To make matters worse, this is actually in the best interest of the social media companies that the average American engages with on an increasingly regular basis. In a particularly controversial slideshow presentation at Facebook, one slide read: “Our algorithms exploit the human brain’s attraction to divisiveness... in an effort to gain user attention and increase time on the platform.”² A Pew Research study in 2025 showed that 84% percent of adults report using YouTube, 71% report using Facebook, and 50% using Instagram.³ These factors combined reveal that the vast majority of American adults are being exposed to intentionally polarizing content regularly.

¹ “Explore - Google Trends.” 2024. Google.com. Trends. 2024.

https://trends.google.com/explore?q=%2Fm%2F045m1_%2C%2Fm%2F0cqt90&date=2025-01-01%202025-12-31&geo=US.

² Patrick Keith Miller, and Keith Simon. 2022. Truth over Tribe. David C Cook.

³ Atske, Sara. 2025. “Americans’ Social Media Use 2025.” Pew Research Center. November 20, 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2025/11/20/americans-social-media-use-2025/>.

The core contention in the political space is the Liberalism versus Conservatism debate. Liberalism, in general, prioritizes the present needs of the seen person as well as the progression of societal norms, whereas Conservatism desires to uphold the structure and well-being of society as a whole while keeping more traditional core values. These two groups would be considered political *ideologies*. In a 2024 study from the Pew Research Center, it was found that among Christians, meaning all denominations including Catholicism, 44% identified as Conservative, 37% percent Moderate, and only 14% Liberal. The other 5% declined to answer.⁴

The most practical way in which the Liberalism versus Conservatism debate is manifest in modern American culture is in the Republicanism versus Democratism dichotomy. In general, Democrats are the political party that represents more Liberal values as well as a larger role of government in the social affairs of American citizens. Republicans tend to represent Conservative values and desire a smaller and more defense-focused role of government. In the same Pew Research Study, 55% of Christians stated that they were Republican or leaned Republican, 38% percent said that they were Democrat or leaned Democrat, and 7% declined to answer.

Politics, because of their intersection with popular culture, have become more to the American than just sets of policies. Political parties have grown to become ways of life and social factions rather than just convenient groupings of practical ideological beliefs. According to another study done by Pew Research Center in 2024, over 50% of both Democrats and Republicans say that the members of the opposing party are dishonest, immoral, and unintelligent.⁵ A study by the same

⁴ Pew Research Center. 2025. "Religious Landscape Study." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

⁵ Pew Research Center. 2022. "As Partisan Hostility Grows, Signs of Frustration with the Two-Party System." Pew Research Center. August 9, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/08/09/as-partisan-hostility-grows-signs-of-frustration-with-the-two-party-system/>.

group in 2019 on partisan antipathy, which attempted to quantify antipathy by asking Democrats and Republicans to give a rating on a “feeling thermometer” of their feelings towards the members of the opposing party, determined that in September of 2019 83% percent of Republicans gave a “cold” rating, which includes any rating under 50 to the members of the Democratic party, and 79% of Democrats did likewise.⁶

A common and pertinent debate among Christians regards how Christians should engage in these political dichotomies, regardless of which side they land on. Verses like Mark 12:17, which says “Jesus said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ And they marveled at him.”⁷ are used in an attempt to discern what the role of the political party should be in a Christian life. Most Christians would agree that engaging in politics in some capacity in order to advance and advocate for God’s justice is valuable, but where Christians often disagree is exactly how invested in and associated with the political parties that they are trying to reform, or reform with, they should be.

Christians can, and should, engage in politics, but they should avoid attaching their personal identity to a political party or ideology. This is for three primary reasons. The first is idolatry. When a Christian attaches themselves to a political party in a way that transcends the natural utilitarian use of knowing who they agree with more, they risk resting too much of their hope on a political party or figure when it should all rest on God. The second is hatred. If a Christian begins to hate his neighbor simply because he is of a different political party, he is prioritizing his worldly allegiance over his biblical

⁶ Pew research Center. 2019. “Partisan Antipathy: More Intense, More Personal.” Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy. October 10, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/10/10/partisan-antipathy-more-intense-more-personal/>.

⁷ Mark 12:17 (English Standard Version)

commission to love his neighbor. The third is the distortion of truth. Christians should never allow their emotions or earthly relationships to distort their perception of reality.

One of the primary risks of attaching one's identity to a political party is slipping into idolatry. When God provided the Israelites with the first and most important commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me."⁸ he was not limiting the transgression of this commandment to the literal confession of faith in literal deified images. This is a concept that most modern Christians grasp, and at its logical end is found the modern understanding of idolatry. Idolatry is the prioritization in one's heart of something other than God over Him. This could be any number of things. Some common idols in current culture include video games, social media, and monetary success. Politics is one of, if not the most relevant idol in modern American Christianity. One of the most plainfaced examples of this can be found in hyper-conservative Christian communities, wherein Donald Trump and his *Make America Great Again* or "MAGA" movement is portrayed as the saviour of America, and an inappropriate amount of hope is placed on his shoulders.⁹ This is also an issue of identity. An article from the National Association of Evangelicals says this: "Partisan politics can be deforming and distorting – even idolatrous. In our time in particular, partisan politics has become a primary source of identity for a growing number of Americans – and as it has grown, the significance of religion as a source of identity has declined."¹⁰ Political identity has begun to overtake the spiritual identity of modern Americans, and this is idolatry for Christians.

⁸ Exodus 20:3

⁹ It should be noted that the higher frequency of examples of inappropriate relationships to politics in the context of conservatism in this paper is intentional, not because conservatives are a larger problem, but because I predict the audience of this paper will be primarily of a conservative background.

¹⁰ Patel, Emma. 2024. "A Christian's Place in Political Parties." National Association of Evangelicals. October 2024. <https://www.nae.org/christians-place-political-parties-cherie-harder/>.

It is easy to see how this could happen. As the previously mentioned data seems to suggest, Donald Trump is currently a more culturally relevant figure in America than Jesus Christ, which is a reflection of the relative popularity of politics and religion. It would be easy for a Christian to subconsciously mistake politics' more prominent role in popular culture as a signal that it is also more important for them to be engaging in. If a Christian is zealous for God and is looking for an avenue on which to fight for Him, they may see politics as the most influential vessel for their passion, which is not wrong in itself. An issue arises, however, when a direct and literal parallel is made from the fight between good and evil to the fight between Republicans and Democrats or Conservatives and Liberals. Christians are certainly in a fight; however, "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."¹¹ Christians, in their passion to "Fight the good fight of the faith,"¹² often mistake the members of the opposing political party as the primary enemy that needs to be fought back against. When the passion that a Christian feels is manifested in a hatred towards the opposing political party and an indiscriminate defense of their own, they have fallen for idolatry, if in good faith.

In the introduction to C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*, he says this about denominations of Christianity:

"In that way it may possibly be of some help in silencing the view that, if we omit the disputed points, we shall have left only a vague and bloodless H.C.F. The H.C.F. turns out to be something not only positive but pungent; divided from all non-Christian beliefs by a chasm to which the worst divisions inside Christendom are not really comparable at all. If I have not directly helped the cause of reunion, I have perhaps made it clear why we ought to be

¹¹ Ephesians 6:12

¹² 1st Timothy 6:12a

reunited. Certainly I have met with little of the fabled odium theologicum from convinced members of communions different from my own. Hostility has come more from borderline people whether within the Church of England or without it: men not exactly obedient to any communion. This I find curiously consoling. It is at her centre, where her truest children dwell, that each communion is really closest to every other in spirit, if not in doctrine. And this suggests that at the centre of each there is something, or a Someone, who against all divergences of belief, all differences of temperament, all memories of mutual persecution, speaks with the same voice.”¹³

This is C.S Lewis' call to Christians to focus on the core doctrine of Christianity and not become too concerned with the peripheral ways that Christians disagree. This extends into politics. No matter of opinion or tribe should get between Christians and their fellow believers.

The modern Internet landscape has cultivated a culture of individualism wherein the primary goal of the individual is to create a unique persona to express themselves with. This is why so many Christians are not just Christians, but rather Conservative Christians, or Feminist Christians, or Bodybuilder Christians, or Transgender Christians. In the pursuit of being a unique person, Christians feel the need to emphasize the ways in which they diverge from their fellow Christians and make them special. This is not to say that the secondary identities of the examples above are necessarily wrong, though some are, but that their unique roster of identities and beliefs is more important to them than their Christianity, and this is the sin of pride and idolatry. Christians should still voice their opinions,

¹³ Lewis, C. S. 1952. *Mere Christianity*. Harpercollins Publishers.

but they should not place those opinions and the social implications of them between themselves and true, *mere* Christianity.

Most modern, western examples of idolatry are found in inanimate or nebulous objects. In the land of democracy, capitalism, and equality, it is less common to see the idolization of a single person. This still happens, though, and nowhere more often than in politics. “Surely this next mayor, governor, or president will be the one to fix my town, state, or country, to *save* my fellow citizens and I from what the last one did.” There are certainly government leaders who do more good than others, but in none will be found salvation or perfection. This tendency is no doubt a product of the tangible but not fully transparent nature of politicians. In a literal sense, it is far easier to see the effects of a president than of God, even though when looked for, the effects of God infinitely outnumber, outlast, and overpower those of any man or number of men.

“And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”¹⁴ If the first commandment warns Christians not to idolize political affiliations above God, the second commandment tells them not to allow political affiliations to create hate in them for their neighbor. As mentioned previously, politically affiliated people frequently think of the members of the opposing party as unintelligent, lazy, and morally reprehensible, and also often harbor feelings of ambivalence and apathy towards them. Christians are called to love. Loving is not the same as enabling, allowing, or agreeing, a misunderstanding responsible for many modern sins and heresies, but it should ultimately be kind. Luke 6 says this: “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return,

¹⁴ Matthew 22:37-40

and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”¹⁵ It would be impossible to read this verse and still think that the Christlike thing to do is to mock, insult, or personally attack members of the opposing political party on Facebook. The following quote from the book *Truth Over Tribe* by Patrick Keith Miller and Keith Simon illustrates this perfectly: “Suddenly, Jesus’s commands to love your neighbor, live with meekness, walk in humility, bless your enemy, and turn the other cheek sound hopelessly naive. You justify disobeying him because you think your personal context is so extraordinarily dangerous that ordinary Christian ethics no longer apply.”¹⁶ If all Christians truly and sincerely sought to bless their political enemies in the face of hostility, the sociopolitical landscape of America would drastically improve. In a situation involving contention between two entities, in order to resolve the conflict, one of the parties must make the first gesture of kindness and humility. Christians should turn the other cheek for no reason other than that they have been commanded to, but when they do, they will find it an extremely effective way to diffuse hostility and promote goodwill. This is not to say, of course, that Christians should not engage in respectful debate with people who disagree with them politically. In fact, debate done well will actually reduce the personal hostility that leads to sin and get both parties closer to understanding the reality of their actual disagreement. It should also be noted that even when a Christian acts in an appropriate and biblical manner, there is no guarantee that anyone will respond reasonably or reciprocate that charity, but Christians should do their part regardless.

A Christian can wholeheartedly disagree and even think that the opinion of another is evil, and still show Christian love for that person in loving redirection or rebuke. This is much harder when the moral or logical disagreement between two people is interpreted as an attack on and a defense of character. One way to think of this is in terms of the common phrase “Love the sinner, hate the sin.” or

¹⁵ Luke 6:35

¹⁶Patrick Keith Miller, and Keith Simon. 2022. *Truth over Tribe*. David C Cook.

“Cum dilectione hominum et odio vitiorum”¹⁷ as it is written in Augustine of Hippo's *Letter 211*. Though this is not a phrase directly from the Bible, it represents the teachings of Jesus well and should be considered in the conversation about political disagreement.

Because of the modern emphasis on individuality, equality, and self-expression, politics have become a more acceptable way of grouping people together. It is seen as a more accurate sign of someone's character than race or religion, because it is a choice that an individual makes and reflects their character more accurately than the circumstances into which they were born. An article published by the Stanford Report says this:

“So why does ‘partyism,’ as the researchers refer to it, trump other social identifiers like gender, race, religion, language and ethnicity – affiliations many Americans value highly?

One reason, the researchers find, is that who you support politically is your choice while factors like your race and ethnicity are assigned at birth. Therefore, because support for a political party is a deliberate decision for an individual, it's viewed as a choice that more accurately reflects who that person truly is. ‘Because partisan affiliation is voluntary, it is a much more informative measure of attitudes and belief structures than, for example, knowing what skin color someone has,’ the study states.

Another reason is that – unlike race, religion and gender, where social norms dictate behavior – there are few, if any, constraints on the expression of hostility toward people who adhere to opposing political ideologies, the researchers said. For example, certain words are

¹⁷ Aurelius Augustinus, Saint, Boniface Ramsey, Roland Teske, and Augustinian Heritage Institute. 2005. Letters 211-270, 1* - 29* = (Epistulae). Hyde Park, Ny New City Press.

out-of-bounds when directed toward people of specific races or genders. But these boundaries don't really apply in a partisan environment and, in fact, boorish behavior can actually be encouraged by party leaders.

'There are no corresponding pressures to moderate disapproval of political opponents,' the study states. 'In fact, the rhetoric and behavior of party leaders suggests to voters that it is perfectly acceptable to treat opponents with disdain. In this sense, individuals have greater freedom to discriminate against out-party supporters.'¹⁸

The general public seems to feel that because an individual's political party is entirely their choice, there is nothing wrong with attacking them for it, unlike race or ethnicity, and this is a problem because of the clearance it gives for hatred.

It is important to remember that Christians are all on the same team. True Christians all have the same mission of proclaiming the Gospel and living the most God-glorifying lives possible. Political disagreements with fellow believers should reflect this. Christians should also take every opportunity possible to show the love of God to unbelievers, because the salvation of the unsaved is more important than anything else a Christian can do, and certainly more important than political disagreements. In general, political opponents should be treated with far more charity than modern America generally calls for. Christians should avoid tying their identity to political parties because it allows political disagreements to become personal resentment.

¹⁸ Martinovich, Milenko. 2017. "Political Party Identities Stronger than Race or Religion." Stanford.edu. Stanford University. 2017. <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2017/08/political-party-identities-stronger-race-religion>.

“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”¹⁹ An integrous engagement of politics by anyone, but especially Christians, is the attempt to promote and enact the most truly good thing. When people become emotionally invested in the social aspect of their political party, they are likely to deprioritize truth in favor of loyalty. Christians need to see through their own emotions, for “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”²⁰ Christians need to prioritize piety over party, truth over tribe, and fact over faction.

Neither political party is perfectly Biblically aligned, and most Christians would agree with this. Even if it were conceded that the policies of one party were perfect, which would be impossible considering that the Bible does not directly address many of the issues that are debated regarding government, the social context of modern American politics would still make the indiscriminate and emotional defense of one a bad idea because of the simple fact that it is a manmade construct led by sinful people. In an interview with Daniel K. Williams about his book “The Politics of the Cross” posted on the Southern Baptist Convention website, he says this:

“Christians who are partisan Republicans are in danger of making a selective version of morality a substitute for a consistent application of God’s principles. Over the past 40 years, the Christian Right has said far more about homosexuality than divorce or premarital sex, and far more about abortion than about the destruction of human life in any other context. At the same time, Christians who have been attracted to the Republican Party’s message have tended to think that moral regulation without personal sacrifice can curb sinful activity. They

¹⁹ John 8:31-32

²⁰ Jeremiah 17:9

have thus advocated abortion restrictions without supporting more costly expansions that would likely be necessary to deter low-income women from having abortions.

Christians who are partisan Democrats are in danger of excusing (or even embracing) their party's stances on abortion, gender identity, and same-sex sexual activity, all of which are clearly at odds with historic Christian teachings and biblical precepts. It has been clear for decades that a Democrat cannot get the party's nomination — and, in most cases, cannot even be elected to Congress or statewide office — without embracing a platform that is in conflict with a historic Christian understanding of these matters.”²¹

Despite this, some Christians will defend their party as though it represents absolute truth, even if they would not say that it literally is. An article from ABC Religion and Ethics puts it like this: “Sadly, many Christians are being tempted not to do this. Like the rest of the community, we’ve become polarised in our thinking about politics and are prone to committing, with a kind of dogmatism characteristic of our age, to positions, parties, and politicians who may or may not be good.”²² One way that Christians could be sure of their prioritization of reality over allegiance to party is the theoretical willingness to oppose a political party that they have historically sided with without hesitation, given evidence that the opposing side offers a more biblical solution. When Christians endorse political parties with an attitude of dogmatic inerrancy, they are committing themselves to a worldly construct, and in the process inevitably endorsing unbiblical behaviour. This is detrimental for the Christian's capacity to evangelize, because when an unbeliever finds an inconsistency between a Christian's

²¹ Lamb, Ethan. 2024. “Why Christians Should Be Political without Being Partisan.” ERLC. May 24, 2024. <https://erlc.com/policy-content/why-christians-should-be-political-without-being-partisan/>.

²² ABC Religion & Ethics. 2024. “‘Hold to Christ’: How Christians Should, and Should Not, Be Politically Engaged.” ABC Religion & Ethics. June 20, 2024. <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/michael-jensen-hold-to-christ-christians-politically-engaged/104002862>.

political affiliation and religious views, it not only paints the individual Christian as lacking discretion, but can even lead the unbeliever to attribute that moral inconsistency to Christianity as a whole.

The decision to vote, the primary way in which American citizens can influence politics, should be taken seriously as a way to move the country in the direction of godly living. When Christians make their decision to vote based on emotions, they are potentially missing an opportunity to advance the kingdom of God. The phenomenon of group irrationality has been documented countless times. Friedrich Nietzsche says this: "Insanity in individuals is something rare- but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule."²³ In his book *The Psychology of Crowds*, Gustave Le Bon says this: "The masses have never thirsted after truth. They turn aside from evidence that is not to their taste, preferring to deify error, if error seduce them. Whoever can supply them with illusions is easily their master; whoever attempts to destroy their illusions is always their victim. An individual in a crowd is a grain of sand amid other grains of sand, which the wind stirs up at will."²⁴ In order for Christians to be set free by the truth, they absolutely must be aware of and reject the influence of crowd mentality on their decision-making.

Some Christians may disagree with these assertions on the basis of their interpretation of Mark 12:13-17 which says:

And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" But, knowing

²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, Origin Unknown

²⁴ دار الكرمة. 2023. سيكولوجية الجماهير and غوستاف لوبون. Al-Karma Books.

their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.²⁵

These Christians might say that they owe their political identity to Caesar, which is incorrect. The denarius that Jesus used as an illustration had the image of Caesar on it, and therefore, according to Jesus, it should be rendered back to the one in whose image it was made. Likewise, as men made in the image of God, Christian's selfhood, the things that make them an image bearer, should be rendered back to God and not to the government.

Christians should, at every opportunity, "take every thought captive to obey Christ"²⁶ and in doing so remove themselves from any situation that will allow or encourage them to place a worldly construct above their worship, love, and understanding of God. Romans 12 says this: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."²⁷ This tells Christians quite clearly that it is only by honest testing and reading of God's word that His good and perfect will can be understood. If one's political associations are the foundation of their identity, they will find their lives to be a structure rotten with idolatry, hatred, and a deprioritization of Truth. While it is important for Christians to engage in politics, the internalization of the social and cultural aspect of them can be devastating for both the individual Christian and those with whom they attempt to share the Gospel.

²⁵ Mark 12:13-17

²⁶ 2nd Corinthians 10:5b

²⁷ Romans 12:2

Let the Christian community be the catalyst for the decline of social polarization and the rise of good faith debate and democracy in America.

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