

Pastors and politicians; It's my party, I'll cry if I want to

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By Rev. James L. Snyder

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Gary Hemsely was running for some county political position — I've forgotten which one now. What I do remember is that he was a member of my church at the time.

Sometimes a pastor can get between the Rock of Ages and a politician without trying too hard. That seemed to be my predicament with Gary. In all things political, I have maintained one basic philosophy: Ask not what your country can do for you, just get out and vote.

I must admit, there are times when it is tempting to throw caution to the wind, roll up my pant legs and wade into the political arena. After all, Christians were the first ones in the arena in the "good ole days." The problem, as I remember from the history books, none of those early Christians ever came out of that arena.

If you think about it, there are some similarities between a preacher and a politician. Perhaps this is why some preachers dabble in politics.

The most obvious similarity would be in the area of communications. Both make their living by giving speeches of some type. The preacher gives his weekly sermon while the politician gives his political oration.

The only difference between a sermon and a political speech is wind velocity. A good politician can change his views on an issue in mid-sentence. Not many preachers have mastered that slight-of-tongue technique.

A good sermon has three points, somewhat related to each other, and progresses toward a conclusion. A good political speech is pointless and related to a raging Nor'easter.

Another important similarity between the preacher and politician is in giving promises.

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The man of cloth deals primarily with the promises in the Good Book. Someone has made the claim that the Bible contains more than 30,000 promises. I cannot verify that number.

I have never stopped to count them. I do know that there are promises for every aspect of life and these promises are available to us through the gracious work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The most important thing about the promises in the Bible is that they are not contingent on the preacher's ability.

The man of the campaign stump also makes promises. Unfortunately, nobody has ever tried to count these, as most count for nothing. These political promises range from anything to everything.

No politician would ever think of expressing his view on an issue without first checking the latest poll on the subject. The politician's goal is to tell the people what he thinks they want to hear.

Someone once observed that if all the people who sit through political speeches were lined up three feet apart, they could at least stretch and sleep more comfortably.

The successful politician is an expert in foul play. I can sum up most political promises nicely: A chicken in every pot and a potshot at every Turkey.

A third similarity between the preacher and the politician concerns money. Both have a lot to say about the subject.

Behind the pulpit, the preacher talks about tithing. Unfortunately, tithing is one of those spiritual disciplines carelessly bantered about and abused.

The truth of the matter is, we present our tithes and offerings to the Lord, not for a blessing but because we have been blessed already. Any other take on this subject does not carry biblical authority. The tithe belongs to God.

Behind the political platform, the politician talks about taxes. One wants to raise my taxes.

Another wants to cut my taxes. The lips may say, "No new taxes," but the heart of every politician says, "expand the old taxes." It all depends on what your definition of "is," is.

It has taken me years but I have finally figured out my income tax.

First, list as dependents your wife, two children, car and three goldfish. Now multiply your age by six and seven–eights and subtract your telephone number. Add those figures, divide by your social security number and multiply by the number of electric lights in your house.

Now you have your gross income, which, after dividing by your chest measurement and subtracting your blood pressure you finally get the amount owed to the government.

Don't tell me I don't listen to those political speeches.

This brings me to my dilemma with Gary Hemsely. He was running for a political office and wanted my support. What I do in that voting booth is between me and nobody else.

I smiled at Gary and said, "Gary, I'll support you as best I can," which I thought would be the end of it. Gary took me more seriously than I thought.

"Pastor," he said to me, "would you mind if I gave my campaign speech in church this coming Sunday morning?"

There are those rare times when a preacher must evolve into a politician and this certainly qualified. I saw two problems to this.

First, Sunday morning worship is no place for a political speech. People might confuse their tithing with taxes, which would be taxing on the collection plate.

More important, Gary could say less in one hour than most people could say in three minutes, but it usually took him two hours to say it. He won the National Stuttering Championship four years in a row,

more than anyone to date. There was no way that I could allow this, but I did not want to hurt Gary's feelings.

I finally looked him in the eye and said, "I'm sorry Gary but we just can't do that. It is a matter of separation of church and state, and you don't want to be accused of violating that. It wouldn't be good for your political career."

Gary saw the rationale of my argument and the matter was settled.

Some critics of Jesus once tried to stump Him on the matter of taxes. He replied, "And Jesus answering said unto them, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they marveled at him." (Mark 12:17 KJV.)

A good citizen, no matter what political party affiliation, knows the difference and does both.

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Your America

By UCAnation

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Chances are your America and our politicians America are not the same place. If you are dead center on the earning scale in real–world twenty–first–century America, you make a bit less than \$32,000 a year, and \$32,000 is not a sum that our politicians have ever associated with "getting by" in this world.

Politicians have never had a job the way you have a job–, where not showing up one morning gets you fired, costing you your health benefits. Politicians may find it difficult to relate personally to any of the nearly two million citizens who have recently lost their jobs, or the nearly 12 million who are still out of work. Politicians have never had to worry that they could not afford the best available health care and education for their children.

For them, forty–three million people without health insurance may be no more than a politically inconvenient abstraction. When politicians talk about the economy, they are not talking about your economy. Their economy is filled with rich pals who fly around in their own airplanes. In politician's economy and world, their friends relocate their companies offshore to avoid paying taxes. Taxes are for chumps like you. You are not a friend. You're the help. When the party our politicians are hosting ends, you'll be left cleaning up the house.

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