

POST ELECTION REFLECTIONS

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The votes have been cast, the “winners” and “losers” have been identified. Rejoicing and remorse reign—descriptions of two distinct halves of U.S. culture and society. Many Christians are rejoicing; other Christians, equally committed to being followers of Jesus, experience remorse.

With the fervor of the election cycle behind us, could we who seek to be followers of Jesus step back and see a larger picture? Could we learn from history, less influenced by the battle between contrasting views? In the United States, we have the right and privilege of voting. We make choices and hope that those choices help set the course of our nation. That very privilege can deceive us into thinking that Christianity will move forward more rapidly when the people and policies of the government support the cause of Christ. How easily we forget that morality cannot be legislated—only behavior, and that with limited success. The political choice faced by Christians in the United States is not a partisan competition between two competing views of the future. The choice for Christians is between personal commitment lived out in faithful discipleship and a power-centric vision and version of Christianity. The end results are starkly different. Commitment changes Christians and the world around us. Power corrupts.

After almost three centuries of persecution, one can hardly blame the Christians who rejoiced when the vision and conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine opened the door to the possibility that the state would be a friend of Christianity rather than an enemy. With the government on the side of Christianity, the spread of Christianity would be easier—that was the belief. Some historians question whether Constantine was a Christian at all. Some see him as an unprincipled power seeker—equally a friend of pagans and Christians, blending mixed allegiances for his personal political purposes.

The perplexity and uncertainty of how to integrate faith and politics, church and government, have challenged Christians ever since. The challenge is intensified in a democracy when Christians seek to gain the upper hand—power-centric Christianity. Make no mistake about it—the risk is real. The greatest risk is to our own faith! Christians must live out and talk about faith and ethics in the public arena—even when such conversation is unpopular, even illegal and persecuted. Life in the Christian majority is deceptive and dangerous. Seeking political advantage becomes more important than seeking Christ! And fewer Christians go forth each day talking about Jesus, putting in a good word for Jesus, with lives of faith explained with words, and made most visible in exemplary ethical behavior. The election is over. What now? “How shall we now live?”