

## **Avoiding Politicising the Gospel: How Should Christian Ministry Relate to Politics?**

Western culture is currently deeply divided over political issues, including economic policy, immigration, abortion rights, patriotism & the Black Lives Matters movement. This has undermined evangelical unity in the United States as some Christian leaders have become highly partisan, whereas others warn against compromising the gospel by involvement in politics. We will look to the Bible, church history and current affairs to consider how the evangelical church should engage in politics today, and how we can lead the church wisely in such febrile times. What stands must we make, and what dangers ought we to avoid?

**John Stevens** is the National Director of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, a family of over 500 Bible-centred churches in the UK, a position that he has held since 2010. Prior to this, he was one of the founding pastors of City Evangelical Church Birmingham, which was planted in the centre of the UK's 2nd largest city in 1999. He was instrumental in starting the Midlands Gospel Partnership, was the course Director of the Midlands Ministry Training Course and is a visiting lecturer at Oak Hill Theological College. John is also one of the pastors of Christchurch Market Harborough, a church he helped to plant when he took up his current role. He was converted whilst studying law at Cambridge University, and after taking a post-graduate degree at the University of Oxford worked for 16 years as a University Lecturer, ending his career as Deputy Head of the Law School at the University of Birmingham. John is married to Ursula and they have four children aged between 12 and 7. He blogs at [www.john-stevens.com](http://www.john-stevens.com) on theology, church life and ministry, culture, and politics.

### **1. The danger of politicising the gospel**

Gospel equated with a political philosophy

Gospel equated with a political party/candidate

Gospel equated with a single issue

Polarisation, division and disunity in church

Distraction from gospel ministry

Gospel discredited in wider culture

US – evangelicalism and the 'religious right' = cf Trump

Europe – evangelicalism and the left

### **2. Evangelicalism and politics in history**

Reformation

Puritanism

Revolution and republicanism

Evangelical social reformers

Fundamentalism

Universal suffrage democracy

Civil Rights

Moral Majority

Social Justice

Culture Wars

Identity politics

### **3. Politics and the mission of the church**

The 'Great Commission' – make disciples

The 'Cultural Mandate' – fill and subdue

Restraining lawlessness

Protecting the vulnerable/lawless

Establishing the kingdom

### **4. Jesus and politics**

Jesus' purpose – 'your kingdom come'

Jesus' practice – Herodians, Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots

Jesus' priorities – prayer and proclamation

### **5. Paul and politics**

'Live quiet lives' – 1 Thes 4

Asserting civic rights

Our weapons – 2 Corinthians 10v4-5

## **6. What should we expect from the state?**

1 Timothy 2v1-7

Civic peace

Gospel freedom

## **7. Pastoral leadership in a political age**

Don't preach politics

Don't bind consciences

Teach wisdom to make judgements

Teach a holistic approach

Teach perspective and gospel priorities

Teach the importance of character

Teach realistic expectations

Model generosity to those who hold a different view

### ***Further Reading:***

Jonathan Leeman, *How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age*

Jonathan Leeman, *How Can I Love Church Members With Different Politics*

James Paul Lusk, *The Jesus Candidate*