

Should the Church Avoid Addressing Issues That the Culture Has Politicized?

April 2023

A church body or congregation might become entangled in politics. They could end up being tied to some party or politician and focusing primarily on social issues. Jesus gets reduced to a political cheerleader: a social reformer and teacher, rather than the God-Man who saves us from sin, death, and the devil by His life, death, and resurrection. We should be on guard against this.

As off-putting as this is when it happens, does this mean that the Church should never address issues that are political? The best way to answer this question is to ask, “What is the purpose of the Church?”

The purpose of the Church is defined in Jesus’ final words before He ascended into heaven at the end of the Gospel of Matthew: go and make disciples of all nations, by baptizing *and teaching them to observe God’s Word*. The purpose of the Church is to make Christians. She does this by baptizing them and teaching them God’s Word.

Based on God’s Word, she teaches them what they are to believe and do. This teaching is not to be done piecemeal, but comprehensively. St. Paul says in Acts 20:37 that the Church has the duty to teach “the whole counsel of God.” The Church doesn’t get to pick and choose which parts of God’s Word should or should not be taught. She teaches the whole counsel of God.

We should not be asking ourselves whether the Church should address issues that have become politicized or culturally divisive. The question we, as members of God’s Church, should ask ourselves is, “Does God’s Word have anything to say about this issue?” If yes, the Church must teach and preach regarding that issue. Whether the issue is political or not doesn’t matter. Whether it’s the kind of politics that people in your congregation favor or

don’t favor doesn’t matter. What the Church must address is not determined by whether the topic is or has become politically divisive. The Church is duty-bound to teach what God addresses in His Word.

This doesn’t mean the Church needs to shout from the rooftop everything that she disagrees with. The Church should not be a bull in a China shop looking to use God’s Word as a club where a deft hand would be more apt. For good reason, St. Peter emphasizes gentleness and respect when defending the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). More prominent than her stance on any other issue, the clearest part of what the Church teaches must always be Christ crucified.

But there are times when the Church must be especially clear and even vocal about what God’s Word teaches about an issue (political or not) because it opposes God’s kingdom. When is this the case? Consider Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 10:5: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.”

Such arguments and pretensions that embed themselves in the Church’s members, and which set themselves up against the knowledge of God, aren’t likely to be the issues that our world is unanimously agreed upon. Not many people in our midst today are likely to be led astray by the argument that genocide is fine and dandy. But, “What is marriage?” “When does life begin?” “Can a man become a woman?” It’s in these hotly contested issues, many of which are in the political spotlight today, where we start to find seeds of doubt that become crafted into “arguments and pretensions” contrary to God’s Word.

The Church cannot remain on the sidelines and be neutral on such issues when God’s Word speaks concerning them. That option isn’t open to her. After all, if the Church isn’t willing to teach her people God’s truth about issues that are also politically or culturally divisive, who will teach them? The Church must remain faithful, teach the full counsel of God, point out sin for what it is, call people to confess their sin, and show them the only one who saves them from it: Jesus their Savior.

Rev. Noah Thompson is pastor of River Heights Lutheran Church in East Grand Forks, Minnesota.

Learn More: www.els.org/apologetics

Should the Church Avoid Addressing Issues That the Culture Has Politicized?

April 2023

A church body or congregation might become entangled in politics. They could end up being tied to some party or politician and focusing primarily on social issues. Jesus gets reduced to a political cheerleader: a social reformer and teacher, rather than the God-Man who saves us from sin, death, and the devil by His life, death, and resurrection. We should be on guard against this.

As off-putting as this is when it happens, does this mean that the Church should never address issues that are political? The best way to answer this question is to ask, “What is the purpose of the Church?”

The purpose of the Church is defined in Jesus’ final words before He ascended into heaven at the end of the Gospel of Matthew: go and make disciples of all nations, by baptizing *and teaching them to observe God’s Word*. The purpose of the Church is to make Christians. She does this by baptizing them and teaching them God’s Word.

Based on God’s Word, she teaches them what they are to believe and do. This teaching is not to be done piecemeal, but comprehensively. St. Paul says in Acts 20:37 that the Church has the duty to teach “the whole counsel of God.” The Church doesn’t get to pick and choose which parts of God’s Word should or should not be taught. She teaches the whole counsel of God.

We should not be asking ourselves whether the Church should address issues that have become politicized or culturally divisive. The question we, as members of God’s Church, should ask ourselves is, “Does God’s Word have anything to say about this issue?” If yes, the Church must teach and preach regarding that issue. Whether the issue is political or not doesn’t matter. Whether it’s the kind of politics that people in your congregation favor or

don’t favor doesn’t matter. What the Church must address is not determined by whether the topic is or has become politically divisive. The Church is duty-bound to teach what God addresses in His Word.

This doesn’t mean the Church needs to shout from the rooftop everything that she disagrees with. The Church should not be a bull in a China shop looking to use God’s Word as a club where a deft hand would be more apt. For good reason, St. Peter emphasizes gentleness and respect when defending the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). More prominent than her stance on any other issue, the clearest part of what the Church teaches must always be Christ crucified.

But there are times when the Church must be especially clear and even vocal about what God’s Word teaches about an issue (political or not) because it opposes God’s kingdom. When is this the case? Consider Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 10:5: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.”

Such arguments and pretensions that embed themselves in the Church’s members, and which set themselves up against the knowledge of God, aren’t likely to be the issues that our world is unanimously agreed upon. Not many people in our midst today are likely to be led astray by the argument that genocide is fine and dandy. But, “What is marriage?” “When does life begin?” “Can a man become a woman?” It’s in these hotly contested issues, many of which are in the political spotlight today, where we start to find seeds of doubt that become crafted into “arguments and pretensions” contrary to God’s Word.

The Church cannot remain on the sidelines and be neutral on such issues when God’s Word speaks concerning them. That option isn’t open to her. After all, if the Church isn’t willing to teach her people God’s truth about issues that are also politically or culturally divisive, who will teach them? The Church must remain faithful, teach the full counsel of God, point out sin for what it is, call people to confess their sin, and show them the only one who saves them from it: Jesus their Savior.

Rev. Noah Thompson is pastor of River Heights Lutheran Church in East Grand Forks, Minnesota.

Learn More: www.els.org/apologetics