

Where do we go from here?
The 2016 election and our future
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Dallas, Texas
November 9, 2016

On January 20, 2017, Donald Trump will take the oath of office as our nation's forty-fifth president. Mr. Trump won one of the most contentious and expensive political campaigns in American history.¹ His historic victory shocked pollsters and political analysts.

What does the 2016 election mean for the future of our country? What does God's word say about the challenges and opportunities we face?

What the election means for the future

As we look to the future, evangelical Christians are especially concerned about the Supreme Court, religious liberty, and abortion.

The Supreme Court

Mr. Trump could nominate as many as four justices to the Supreme Court.

The late Antonin Scalia's seat will be the first to be filled. If Mr. Trump nominates and the Senate confirms a conservative justice, he or she will join Chief Justice John Roberts, Samuel Alito, and Clarence Thomas to compose a four-justice conservative bloc. Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer will remain a four-vote liberal bloc, with Anthony Kennedy as the swing vote.

However, Ginsburg and Breyer are eight-three and seventy-eight years old, respectively. Assuming they retire during his administration, Mr. Trump could then nominate young justices to form a six-vote majority for decades to come. If Anthony Kennedy retires (he is eighty years old), Mr. Trump could create a lasting seven-vote majority. In addition, he will be able to fill nearly one hundred vacancies in the federal district and circuit courts, with more to come during his term.

Of course, the president's appointees must be confirmed by the US Senate. After the November 8 election, Republicans retained control of the Senate and will presumably confirm Mr. Trump's nominations.

Mr. Trump's campaign platform states that he will "appoint justices to the United States Supreme Court who will uphold our laws and our Constitution. The replacement for Justice Scalia will be a person of similar views and principles who will uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States."²

As the Supreme Court hears cases regarding abortion, transgender rights, marriage, and a host of other social issues, its ideological composition is of crucial importance to the future of our nation.

Religious liberty

Religious freedom is an escalating issue in our day.

For instance, the US Commission on Civil Rights recently released a frightening report. It states clearly that if someone alleges discrimination relative to their sexual orientation or gender identity, their claim takes precedence over religious freedom. The Commission's chairman summarized the report: "The phrases 'religious liberty' and 'religious freedom' will stand for nothing except hypocrisy so long as they remain code words for discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, Christian supremacy or any form of intolerance."³

If the Commission's report becomes reality, would Christians be unable to engage in any public faith expression that someone considers intolerant? What would a same-sex couple say about my refusal to perform their wedding?

In light of such issues, the Republican Party's platform makes clear its defense of religious liberty. It affirms support for a constitutional amendment defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman. And it includes a "pledge to respect the religious beliefs and rights of conscience of all Americans and to safeguard the independence of their institutions from government."

In the context of health services, traditional marriage, and abortion, the platform states: "We pledge to respect the religious beliefs and rights of conscience of all Americans and to safeguard the independence of their institutions from government." It also calls for "a federal investigation into attempts to deny religious believers their civil rights."⁴

Mr. Trump has announced his support for the First Amendment Defense Act (FADA). This legislation is intended to protect from government discrimination religious Americans who believe that marriage is a union between one man and one woman.⁵ He has also stated his opposition to the Johnson Amendment, legislation that prohibits tax-exempt organizations from endorsing political candidates.⁶

Abortion

Three abortion issues are relevant to the presidential election.

One: Federal funding for abortion.

The Hyde Amendment was enacted in 1976 to bar the use of federal funds to pay for abortion unless the pregnancy resulted from incest, rape, or to save the life of the mother. Previously, the federal government paid for 300,000 abortions with taxpayer funds every year from 1973 until the Amendment was enacted.

It is estimated that the Hyde Amendment has saved the lives of approximately two million children who would otherwise have been aborted. It routinely saves more than 60,000 lives every year in the US. More than 258,000 babies in Texas, more than 171,000 babies in Florida, and more than 100,000 babies in Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania have been saved.⁷

The Helms Amendment, adopted in 1973, limits the use of US foreign assistance for abortion. If it were to be repealed, taxpayers (regardless of their position on abortion) would help fund abortions in other countries.

Hillary Clinton repeatedly stated her support for repealing the Hyde Amendment, claiming that it makes it more difficult for low-income women to obtain an abortion.⁸ (Vice-presidential nominee Tim Kaine continues to support the Amendment, despite reports to the contrary.⁹) Mrs. Clinton also stated her opposition to the Helms Amendment, citing the use of rape by terrorist groups overseas.¹⁰

By contrast, the Republican Party platform states that "the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed." As a result, "We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and endorse legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment's protections apply to unborn children." The platform also opposes use of public revenues to promote or perform abortion, or to fund organizations which do so.¹¹

Mr. Trump has made clear his belief that the Hyde Amendment should be made permanent. Presumably, he would take the same position with regard to the Helms Amendment.¹²

Two: Efforts to force medical providers to refer patients for abortions.

In recent years there have been escalating efforts to force medical providers to refer patients for abortions. For example, an Illinois law set to take effect January 2017 requires providers to help patients seeking abortions by referring or transferring them to such providers or by furnishing written information about such providers. The ACLU unsuccessfully sought to force a Catholic healthcare group not just to refer patients for abortions, but to perform them.

Mrs. Clinton affirmed her belief that all employers must pay for contraceptives and abortifacients, no matter their religious objections.¹³ By contrast, Donald Trump has stated,

The primary responsibility of the federal government is to protect the rights of its citizens. Life is the most fundamental right. The federal government should not diminish this right by denying its protection. I am opposed to abortion except for rape, incest and life of the mother. I oppose the use of government funds to pay for abortions.

Presumably this position indicates that his administration will oppose efforts to force employers and health care providers to deliver abortion services.

Three: Genetic testing and abortion.

We are likely to see abortions escalate in coming years as genetic testing reveals more information about unborn children than ever before.

Parents can already know the gender of their unborn child as well as data on a wide spectrum of heritable diseases. In the future, parents may be able to learn about their unborn child's aptitudes as well. Intelligence, athletic capacities, body type, and other characteristics are likely to be more knowable through such testing.

During the incoming Trump administration, efforts to use tax funds or government authority to promote abortion are likely to lessen. However, so long as abortion remains legal in America, the lives of unborn children will be at risk.

How Christians should respond

Jesus gave us the foundational metaphor for our engaging our culture when he told his followers,

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:13–16; all citations from ESV).

"You" is plural in the Greek, indicating that our Lord meant his metaphors for all believers, not just the "clergy" or his original apostles. "Are" is a present-tense statement, showing that we are at this moment what he claims us to be. "The" shows that we are the *only* salt and light of the world. "Salt" preserved, purified, and gave flavor. "Light" is the only antidote to the darkness of our culture.

Both salt and light are obvious when they are made public. Salt affects all it touches; light defeats darkness wherever it is displayed. The question is not whether we are the only salt and light of the culture. The question is whether we will fulfill our calling effectively.

A little light or salt can change everything. Contact your world—salt and light are no good unless they are unleashed. And seek to glorify God, knowing he will use your good works to lead others to himself.

How can we be salt and light over the next four years?

Learning from Scripture

Trust the sovereignty of God

The 2016 election is America's latest expression of our long-running belief that citizens are capable of choosing their best leaders. But human freedom must be viewed in the context of

divine sovereignty. Scripture is clear: "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). As wise King Solomon noted, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will" (Proverbs 21:1).

If we look to the government for salvation, we commit idolatry. The greatest needs of the human heart cannot be met by human means. No elected official can forgive sin or save souls. No government on earth can guarantee eternity in heaven.

Whether you supported Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump, know that your Father still rules on the throne of the universe. The question is, does he rule on the throne of your heart?

Serve and pray for your leaders

The Apostle Paul was clear: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1). Peter agreed: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good" (1 Peter 2:13–14).

We are called to intercede for our leaders as well: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions . . ." (1 Timothy 2:1–2a). Such intercession is vital to our personal well-being: ". . . that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (v. 2b). And it is vital to our relationship with our Lord: "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (vv. 3–4).

All Christians are called to pray for Mr. Trump and others in elective office.

Learning from history

The Jerusalem Post called the 2016 election "the most vicious presidential race in modern history."¹⁴ It's easy to believe that our nation has been so roiled by this election that we will never find unity again. Indeed, there are clear and deep divisions between significant people groups and policy positions in our country.

But we've been here before.

The 1800 election threatened to undo the new Republic. President John Adams ran for reelection against Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr. The latter two tied in the Electoral College; Alexander Hamilton threw his support to Jefferson, ensuring his election.

The 1824 election yielded no majority of electoral votes, so the House of Representatives had to decide the winner. John Quincy Adams was selected, though Andrew Jackson received more electoral votes. Adams then chose Henry Clay, the man who controlled the House, as his Secretary of State; Jackson called this a "corrupt bargain." The legitimacy of the presidency was questioned by many.

The 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln led to the Civil War. The 1876 election yielded no winner in the Electoral College; a fifteen-member commission decided the election for Rutherford Hayes, whose opponent won 250,000 more ballots in the popular vote and nineteen more electoral votes. In 1912, Theodore Roosevelt created a third party to run against his chosen successor, William Howard Taft; they split the vote, leading to Woodrow Wilson's election. The 2000 contest was decided five weeks after the election when the Supreme Court ruled by a narrow majority to stop recounts in Florida.

The Church has faced much greater persecution than we face in America today. I've traveled to Cuba eight times and can report first-hand on the courage exhibited by countless believers in the face of enormous pressure. I've met Christians in China who risk much to worship Jesus. I've befriended former Muslims whose Christian commitment threatens their lives and families.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was right: "All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen."

Engaging culture

Seek transformation

In 1951, Richard Niebuhr published *Christ and Culture*.¹⁵ It was my seminary textbook in biblical ethics and is still considered fundamental and foundational to the discipline today. Niebuhr sketches the five ways Christians can relate their faith to their society and culture.

One: Christ against culture.

This model argues that we must have as little engagement with the fallen culture and its issues as possible. However, the Incarnation seems to contradict this approach. If the physical world is inherently fallen, how could Jesus have remained sinless while inhabiting flesh?

Two: Christ of culture.

This model attempts to integrate the culture and the Christian faith. It blurs the distinction between the two and adopts the prevailing culture as the way to understand the faith. However, the Great Commission gives the lie to this approach. Why "go and make disciples of all nations" if the nations do not need to be evangelized and discipled?

Three: Christ above culture.

This approach teaches that we live in two worlds, the spiritual and the secular, and we must give each its due. The great problem with this approach is the sinfulness of humanity. This model does not do enough to transform the culture it seeks to help.

Four: Christ and culture in paradox.

This approach rejects the third model by arguing that culture is so inherently sinful as to be beyond saving. Yet it contradicts the first approach by arguing that we must try. We must preach grace to law, the gospel to the lost. We respond to the issues of our culture by preaching the gospel of salvation, for only when souls change can the world change. The problem with this approach is that it does not speak to non-salvation issues the Bible itself addresses, such as the treatment of the poor.

Five: Christ transforming culture.

This model seeks to bring the biblical worldview to bear on every dimension of society for the purpose of redeeming the culture for the Kingdom. Unlike the first model, it does not ignore the culture; unlike the second, it does not adopt it; unlike the third, it does not separate the two realms; unlike the fourth, it seeks the salvation of souls but also the transformation of society. It seeks to apply biblical truth to cultural issues for the sake of advancing the Kingdom of God on earth.

As salt and light, we are called to make a transforming difference in our culture. It is not enough to engage the issues we face—we must be used by the Holy Spirit to change lives and society. God wants to see the hungry fed, the naked clothed, the imprisoned visited, the lost saved. He wants to see divorce and abortion rates plummet, drug abuse end, pornography and prostitution abolished.

As the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), we are called to join Jesus in his transforming work today.

Get involved

I'm convinced that God is calling more Christians into public service than are answering his call. Just as the Lord calls people to be pastors and missionaries, he calls us to be businesspeople, attorneys, teachers, and politicians. And he calls those who are not politicians to engage in the political process however we can.

Know the challenges we are facing as believers in America. Pray for the Spirit to show you how you can use your influence to make a difference, whether the issue relates to abortion, religious liberty, marriage, or any other question. Get involved in your local community, whether through the school board, your city council, or personal relationships with civic leaders. Use your influence to express and defend biblical truth.

Jesus did not found a political party, a business, or a nation. He founded the church. He wants his church to attack the gates of hell, with the promise that when we do, the gospel always prevails (Matthew 16:18).

But the church is much more than a building or a worship service—it is the community of faith, the body of Christ, working holistically to bring God's purpose to pass in every dimension of life. Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"

(Matthew 6:10). Make this your prayer for your community and country. Then ask God how he wants you to be the answer to your prayer.

Stay united

Timothy Keller, senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, recently warned Christians not to allow politics to divide us. Before you're anything else, he noted, "you're Christian first." His reminder was prophetic:

All across the world there is a lot of political fragmentation . . . there is more and more political fragmentation in so many countries, and unfortunately Christians might be tempted to be fragmented right along. We might start getting divided politically instead of remembering that you're Christian first and you're white, black, Asian, Hispanic, second. You're a Christian first and you're American, or you're British and you're African second.¹⁶

It is vital that we heed his warning. When we choose what unites us over what divides us, Jesus promises that "all people will know that you are my disciples" (John 13:35).

Conclusion

I believe our Lord wants to use the 2016 election to inspire Christians in at least three ways.

One: God is calling us to be more engaged in cultural transformation than ever before (Acts 4:32–36).

God's principles for life were given to us because they are best for us. We don't break God's word—we break our lives against its truth. The person who jumps from a tenth-story building doesn't break the law of gravity—he illustrates it.

As the consequences of immorality continue to spread in our fallen world, it will be even more urgent that Christians bring salt and light to a world desperate for both. Culture-changing Christianity is the order of the day.

Two: God is calling us to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

While it is vital that we stand strongly for truth, it is also vital that we do so in grace. A superior attitude is counter to the servant spirit of Jesus. We are no better than anyone else—we are all saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8–9). None of us deserves what all of us can experience—the transforming love of a Father who forgives every sin we confess and heals every heart that trusts in him. We are beggars telling beggars where we found bread.

Three: God is calling us to renew our focus on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1–2).

The vitriol and divisiveness of the 2016 election didn't create a new reality—it exposed what was already true. Humans are fallen beings. We are weak, egotistical, fearful, critical, and deceitful. The election proved once again that humans cannot solve the greatest problems humans face.

Like other Americans, Christians in the US have spent much time in recent weeks discussing, debating, and worrying over the election. Now it's time to "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1–2). We are called to know him and make him known, to seek the lost, comfort the needy, encourage the hurting, and serve the Lord.

The next person you meet will live forever, either with God or separated from him in hell. Therefore, the next person you meet is more important than any election or country. The good news you offer that person is the greatest news in all eternity. Nothing that happened in the election changes the fact that God is love (1 John 4:8). Sharing his love is the most amazing privilege on earth.

Keith and Kristyn Getty are one of the greatest hymn-writing teams of our day. The words to their hymn "My Worth Is Not In What I Own" have been resonating in my spirit as I've written this essay. Let's consider them as God's call to what matters most today:

*My worth is not in what I own
Not in the strength of flesh and bone
But in the costly wounds of love
At the cross.*

*My worth is not in skill or name
In win or lose, in pride or shame
But in the blood of Christ that flowed
At the cross.*

*I rejoice in my Redeemer
Greatest Treasure,
Wellspring of my soul
I will trust in Him, no other.
My soul is satisfied in Him alone.¹⁷*

Your worth is not found in anything this election or this world can offer. It is found in "the costly wounds of love at the cross." The election that matters most happened there, and you won.

¹ According to *Newsweek*, the cost of the election could exceed \$6.6 billion, the most expensive in history. See Michele Gorman, "Cost of 2016 Election Could Top \$6.6 Billion," *Newsweek*, October 25, 2016 (<http://www.newsweek.com/election-cost-could-reach-66-billion-513539>, accessed 7 November 2016).

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- ³ "Peaceful Coexistence: Reconciling Nondiscrimination Principles With Civil Liberties," *US Commission on Civil Rights* (<http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/Peaceful-Coexistence-09-07-16.PDF>, accessed 1 November 2016), p. 29.
- ⁴ "We The People: A Restoration of Constitutional Government," *GOP* (<https://www.gop.com/platform/we-the-people/>, accessed 2 August 2016).
- ⁵ Alexandra Desanctis, "Senator Lee Introduces a Bill to Protect Religious Liberty," *National Review*, September 28, 2016 (<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/440502/trump-supports-bill-protecting-religious-liberty-introduced-mike-lee>, accessed 8 November 2016).
- ⁶ David Sherfinski, "Donald Trump's push to repeal Johnson Amendment buoys religious freedom advocates," *The Washington Times*, August 14, 2016 (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/aug/14/donald-trumps-push-to-repeal-johnson-amendment-buo/>, accessed 8 November 2016).
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- ⁹ Ruby Mellen, "Kaine breaks with Clinton on abortion provision," *CNN*, August 1, 2016 (<http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/31/politics/tim-kaine-hillary-clinton-hyde-amendment-abortion/>, accessed 1 August 2016).
- ¹⁰ Dan Merica, "Clinton on rape, abortion in war zones," *CNN*, November 23, 2015 (<http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/23/politics/hillary-clinton-rape-abortion-isis/>, accessed 1 August 2016).
- ¹¹ "We The People: A Restoration of Constitutional Government," *GOP* (<https://www.gop.com/platform/we-the-people/>, accessed 1 August 2016).
- ¹² Eliza Collins, "Trump announced 'pro-life coalition,' supports making Hyde Amendment permanent," *USA Today*, September 16, 2016 (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2016/09/16/trump-marjorie-dannenfelser-anti-abortion-rights/90431388/>, accessed 8 November 2016).
- ¹³ Jay Hobbs, "4 Ways Hillary Clinton Will Increase Abortion as President," *The Federalist*, October 19, 2016 (<http://thefederalist.com/2016/10/19/four-ways-hillary-will-increase-abortion/>, accessed 31 October 2016).
- ¹⁴ Michael Wilner, "On eve of election, world braces with fear and uncertainty," *The Jerusalem Post*, November 7, 2016 (<http://www.jpost.com/US-Elections/On-eve-of-election-world-braces-with-fear-and-uncertainty-471879>, accessed 8 November 2016).
- ¹⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).
- ¹⁶ Leonardo Blair, "Tim Keller Warns Christians About Being Divided by Politics: 'You're Christian First,'" *The Christian Post*, October 28, 2016 (<http://www.christianpost.com/news/tim-keller-warns-christians-about-being-divided-by-politics-youre-christian-first-171157/>, accessed 7 November 2016).

¹⁷ Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, and Graham Kendrick, "My Worth Is Not In What I Own," *Getty Music* (<http://www.gettymusic.com/my-worth-is-not-in-what-i-own/>, accessed 8 November 2016).