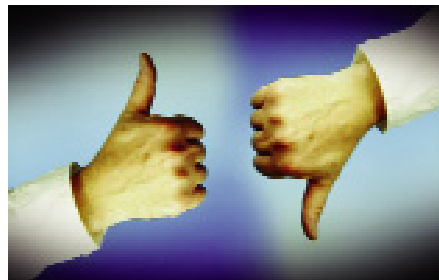


by Jim Fowler

You can't get away from it. Everything in our society is permeated with political gamesmanship and polarizing posturing promoting an ideological agenda for supposed social good. As much as we might decry the prolonged clamoring of the political process, we cannot get away from the fact that this is the game that the world plays.

Is the political process a "necessary evil" in modern society? Not necessarily, for the political process itself is not necessarily evil. There has to be a process whereby ideas for social action are bounced back-and-forth and "hammered out" on the anvil of public opinion, allowing leaders to be elected who will attempt to imple-

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ment the programs they are convinced will serve the highest good of the society they serve.

It is not fair to demonize all politicians or to depict the political process as a diabolical arena that is a prelude to hell itself. There is, without a doubt, much evil and sinful character exhibited by many participants in the political process as their conflicting opinions can lead to false accusations, pretentious promises and deceitful demagoguery. But the sins of the personal participants must not be allowed to poison our perspective of the necessary political process.

Christians and the Political Process

How should Christians respond to the less than ideal political process that plays out in seeming perpetuity in our modern world?

It is important to recognize that the "world" is not the kingdom of God, and never will become such. Governmental policies determined by political processes are in the realm of the provisional and penultimate—they are not the ultimate and perfect social order that God intends for his people. Governance in the

world will never be perfect or heavenly.

We must always beware of the political illusion that projects an infinite and absolute importance to earthly political processes. When politicians position themselves as pseudo-saviors who can save the nation and provide every fulfillment for an individual's needs and desires, we must be able to see through their vaulted vanities of constructing a utopian social paradise. As "citizens of heaven," Christians should have a unique perspective

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that relativizes the political process and sees it for what it is in relation to eternal realities.

Of course, every one of us has political sympathies based on philosophical orientations and social trajectories—established attitudes comprised of developed opinions and prejudices concerning social policy.

Let's not pretend that each of our personal viewpoints is based on God's perspective or formulate a fixed tenet of Christian faith. We must have the humility that recognizes our political ideologies as but personal opinions.

Political Participation

To what extent, then, should Christians participate in the political

processes of the society in which we dwell? It is here that we can appreciate the freedom of God's grace in the Christian life. We are free to participate politically or to not participate. We are free to vote in elections or to refrain from voting. To advocate abstention from political participation or to demand acceptance of particular political ideologies or involvement in political movements—these are invalid limitations of Christian freedom. Whether a Christian is intensely involved in the political process or completely ambivalent and indifferent to politics has no bearing on that person's Christian maturity.

The real freedom of Christian participation in the political



process is the gracious provision of God's power and character that allows us to avoid getting "sucked into" the political mind-set that considers political machinations to be matters of "ultimate concern." Only by God's grace can we discuss political issues and participate in the political process in such a way that the passionate emotions evoked by such do not issue forth in the "works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19-21 NKJV), but continue to manifest the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22,23 NKJV) in a loving witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to those around us.

As the world around us conducts its necessary game of political posturing, we who are "in the world, but not of the world" (John 17:11, 16) are well-advised to remember that political determinations are not permanent matters of eternal importance, while an individual's acceptance and manifestation of the life and character of Jesus Christ do indeed have eternal consequences. □

Jim Fowler is a husband, father, grandfather, theologian, author and former pastor whose Christ In You ministry can be found at www.christinyou.com. Jim serves PTM as our theological consultant. You will find Jim to be a theologian you can understand, one with a great sense of humor and a zest for the new life that our Lord lives inside those who trust and believe in him.

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