

CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Biblical Principles for Active Faith

“I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.” – *Philemon 1:6 (NIV)*

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Introduction: The World's Way vs. Christ's Way

How are Christians supposed to engage in political activism?

The answer lies in a much larger question: How are Christians supposed to do *anything*?

Do we figure out what's right and wrong based on our personal interests and what "feels" good?

Do we determine what's good to do based on what our friends say, or our boss, or our pastor, or our denomination?

Or do we go to the Bible, "dig in" to the Scriptures, and follow the Word given to us by God Himself? Do we believe that the Bible has the answers to *all* of life, or not?

The answer is obvious, isn't it? We follow the principles set forth in the Bible.

But what about that first question: how are we supposed to engage in political activism, *as Christians* – disciples of Christ?

Do we look at the "hot-button" issues of the day, figure out what course of action by our elected officials would most benefit us personally, and then tell them that we want them to vote that way?

Do we pick a side that seems to be closest to what Christian or "conservative" political leaders are telling us is the "right" side, and then tell our elected officials to vote the "right" way?

Or do we search the Bible, find out what the Lord has to say about every issue – *and how to speak out about those issues* – and then take action in accordance with what He has commanded?

Again, the answer should be obvious – we follow the principles set forth in the Bible. Unfortunately, for far too many of those who call themselves Christians, it doesn't seem to be obvious at all. And I include myself in that group.

My Own History

For a number of years now, I've worked in the political arena. I grew up in a very politically active family; most of my undergraduate and graduate work was in the field of political science, and I was very involved in politics while on campus, from campaigning for national candidates to being elected to serve in the University Senate and writing a political opinion column in the campus newspaper.

When I finished with my master's degree, my wife and I moved to south Florida, so that I could start my doctoral work while teaching there at the university. As a Christian, I read many books and articles by godly men and women concerning the important issues of the day, and whatever issues and events occurred, I would always try to view them through the lens of scripture.

At one point, I even decided to run for political office. There was an incumbent State Representative whom I believed was voting the "wrong" way in office, so I challenged him in the party primary. His stance on many issues was more "liberal" than mine, and I highlighted that fact in our debates and in my brochures, mailings and signs. My family and I, along with other volunteers, knocked on hundreds of doors for many weeks, asking for votes. Unfortunately (or so I thought at the time), I lost that election, and I went back to my studies and teaching.

Not long thereafter, I left academia to go into the ministry, and went on staff at a large church there in Miami. While at the university, I had had access to the internet, which was a new "phenomenon" back then. Having developed a keen interest in this new form of communication, I set out to learn everything I could about it, and subsequently helped launch our church's internet ministry; under the cutting-edge leadership of the senior pastor (and my very dear friend and spiritual mentor), Dr. Rick Patterson, we were soon finding every way we could to put the church into the "vanguard" of using the internet, bringing churches online, streaming audio and video sermons and Christian concerts, and even getting the church's Bible college into distance education via the 'net.

Of course, we needed to find a way to get online users *to* all of these websites, so guided by Dr. Patterson's keen marketing insight, we began to

learn how to integrate the internet and the field of marketing – another “first” that would soon come in handy, because in just a few years, God led my family to move to Georgia, in order to be near my wife’s family, as her mother had developed a brain tumor. At just the right time, He opened the door to a job at a large direct marketing company, which was looking for someone to launch and direct their new Internet Marketing Department. They needed someone who knew the internet, knew marketing, and knew how to work with nonprofits (their main fundraising clients were groups like the Salvation Army and Red Cross). It was a perfect fit, and for several years I learned how to “translate” direct marketing – especially direct mail – techniques to internet fundraising.

Coming Full Circle

Then, seemingly out of the blue, I received a letter from a man named Richard Viguerie. Viguerie, if you haven’t heard of him, is a legend of sorts – he actually “invented” political direct mail fundraising in the 1960s, by developing postal lists of campaign donors whom he would solicit for various conservative causes and candidates. Well, his letter to me was “direct,” too; he was looking for someone to bring his operation into the online world – someone who knew how to do direct marketing on the internet, knew how to do fundraising online, and most of all, had a good working knowledge of conservative politics. It was a perfect fit.

I took the job as Viguerie’s vice president. And while his firm was located just outside of Washington, D.C., he made it clear that I didn’t need to move up there, since most of what I would be doing would be done online. I would fly up for a few days every couple of weeks to “put out fires” and have meetings, but for the most part, I was hard at work figuring out the different ways to “activate” conservatives and Christians to use the internet to advance the conservative cause and, of course, make donations.

Throughout all of this time, Viguerie was a real “guru” to me, taking me under his wing and teaching me more than I could have ever hoped to learn about political activism, fundraising and direct marketing. The man was a real genius, and we figured out very quickly the potential power of the internet for doing all of those things. And if it hadn’t been for the tragic events of September 11, 2001, it’s likely I would still be working for him.

However, after 9/11, political fundraising dried up across the board. Viguerie saw that he had to devote all of his time and resources to saving his direct mail company, and decided to shut down his internet operation. Every other firm was hit just as hard, so no one was looking to hire. My family had just moved into a new house, and we were still trying to sell our old one, which meant we were paying two mortgages for a few months. My wife and I had a tough decision to make, but we prayed and felt God was leading me to start my own political consulting firm, to put into practice all that I had been learning for so many years now.

I launched my firm at the beginning of 2002, dedicated to helping conservative candidates and organizations to raise money and engage their members in grassroots activism using the internet. My first client was my old boss, Richard Viguerie. I worked hard to keep his online operation from going under, and I worked completely on commission – which meant that I had to make sure that whatever I was doing actually worked.

It did work – so well, in fact, that after six months Viguerie decided to take it all back in-house. That was fine – I had taken on a number of other clients by then, and God was blessing the business. For the next nine months or so, I built up “opt-in” email lists of conservatives and Christians, and began sending them regular “Action Alerts” about issues, congressional bills, etc. which would have an effect on them and the country, and directing them to sign petitions and contact their Congressmen and Senators to urge them to vote one way or another. These Alerts became very popular and were forwarded all over the place, which brought in a steady stream of new activist subscribers to my lists.

In March of 2003, my work took a new direction. A very liberal online group, which had developed its own large email subscriber list, had put together a coalition of left-wing groups to engage in what they dubbed the “virtual march on Washington” in opposition to the war to liberate Iraq. Their idea was to have all of their members contact Congress on the same day, to overwhelm their inboxes with messages. In response, I worked with other conservative groups and leaders to launch a nationwide counter-drive using the Internet to contact Congress in support of the troops and their mission.

I didn't realize it then, but I had just formed a new political organization. Working with a conservative networking genius named Phil Sheldon – a

Christian brother whom I now consider one of my closest friends – we built this group into an online “juggernaut” that could activate hundreds of thousands of conservatives in a few hours to “demand” that Congress, or the President, or an agency or government official, do the “right” thing on whatever issue we saw as pressing at that moment.

We sent out regular emails on taxes, governmental spending, illegal immigration, judicial nominations, abortion, and more. We got members involved in street demonstrations, counter-protests, and rallies; we went to the Florida capitol and lobbied state legislators to try and save the disabled Terri Schiavo from being starved to death by her estranged husband. We even launched a Political Action Committee (PAC), to raise money to donate to conservative candidates against liberal incumbents (both Democrat and Republican).

It wasn't long before we were on a lot of folks' “radar screens,” raising millions of dollars and generating millions of messages to national leaders on the “hot-button” issues of the day. I had become very adept at “copywriting,” and thanks to all those years of experience, I knew how to write emails that “got results.” I could frame an issue, demonize our opponents, galvanize our supporters, and emphasize the immediate “call to action” to get done whatever needed to get done. Our supporters loved us, and our opponents hated us with a passion. I traveled regularly to Washington, D.C., to meet with other conservative leaders, Congressmen, and Senators; I was even invited to the White House a couple of times, and had the privilege of meeting President Bush there.

I thought I was doing all the right things. After all, we were engaging Christians and conservatives in politics; we were countering “bad” groups and people who were promoting the “wrong” policies, policies that would bring harm to our nation and the world; we were speaking up for Truth, Justice and the American Way. We were a whirlwind.

But behind the whirlwind, God started speaking to me in that still, small voice.

“Commands of Christ”

In my daily devotions and quiet time, the words of Christ in the scriptures kept popping up and tugging at my heart: “Let your light shine,” “Seek

God's kingdom," "Be a servant," "Love your enemies" – in fact, the more I studied the commands of Christ, the more I realized how much they applied to the Christian's duty to be politically active... and the more I realized how little I was applying them.

Yes, I believe that all I had been doing up to this point was "good" – but I also saw that I had been employing *man's* ways, *man's* teachings, while ignoring the plain language of Christ's commands to His disciples.

So what are these "commands of Christ?" I first started learning about them when I was leading a "small group" at the church where I was an elder; I used a Bible study curriculum by that name, published by the Institute in Basic Life Principles. The concept has to do with the meaning of "discipleship," and comes straight from the "Great Commission" given by Jesus in Matthew 28:20: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." As Dr. Bill Gothard, the author of the curriculum, stated, "So what were all the commands of Jesus? A survey of the Gospels will produce about 49 general commands that every believer should follow. This, then, is the curriculum for carrying out the Great Commission and being a disciple."

Just like navigators on the old wind-driven ships used to "keep the stars" to chart a course across the ocean, these 49 commands of Christ are to be "kept" in the same way: "as dependable lights for charting a course throughout life." In the same way, I've come to realize that these commands, which are crafted around the theme to love God with all of our hearts and to love one another (see Matt. 22:40 and John 13:34), are also applicable to how we are to relate to those in political authority as we engage in "activism" to advance Biblically-correct values and policies in civil government.

This book, then, is the direct result of my own studies of the Commands of Christ, and how each of them can be applied to our duty, as disciples of Christ, to "be active in sharing our faith" in all areas of life... including the area of political activism. Just like you, I'll never be "perfect" in applying them at all times and in every situation – but, with the grace of God, I intend to make that my goal.

Won't you join me?