

UNITED, NOT DIVIDED

Read the attached article (taken from the **VISION 03/2024** insert) then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Luke 11:17

John 17:20-21

John 13:34-35

Galatians 6:2

MAIN TAKE-AWAY

Politics by nature is about taking sides; Christianity is about being unified in our love for our heavenly Father and for each other.

QUESTIONS

1. When we say politics, is that just referring to elections or are there issues that can be considered political?
2. How can we respond when confronted by an opposing political view?
3. How does our behavior (either in person or on social media) reflect on the image of Christianity? Does that apply only to ministers holding service or to everyone?
4. The article highlights some characteristics of the early Christians. What specific practices or attitudes from this period can modern Christians adopt to influence today's societal norms positively?
5. Does political banter contribute to anyone's salvation? Could it be a hindrance?
6. How can Christians navigate political discussions in a way that reflects Jesus' teachings, especially in an increasingly polarized environment? What practical steps can be taken to prevent such discussions from becoming divisive?
7. In what ways can the church effectively model living the gospel in society, especially regarding non-judgment and bringing people closer to Christ?

[illegible]

ARTICLE

UNITED, NOT DIVIDED: Why we won't be talking politics

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls (Luke 11:17).

Politics are about taking sides: one opinion against the other, who is right and who is wrong, who will win and who will lose. It's about convincing and coercing people to join your side, your team, your party against the other.

Jesus is the precious Mediator. His message is for all, His salvation is for all, and His love is for all. When the church picks a side, it alienates half its members. How can a church that chooses a side serve all? How can a minister who chooses a side care for every member? How can a member who chooses a side create a place where everyone feels at home and experiences the love of God? In Galatians 3:28, Paul calls the people out of their old identities and classes, out of their chosen sides, and asks them to adopt something new: *to be one in Christ Jesus*.

Right before His betrayal and arrest, Jesus prays: *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me"* (John 17:20-21).

Who does Jesus pray for? Future believers: Jews, Gentiles, Romans, Samaritans, the enslaved and the enslavers, the educated and not so educated, the poor, middle class, and wealthy, the singled, married, divorced, and remarried, every race, every tongue, the Democrats, Republicans, Independents, Indecisive. All those who will believe. You and me.

What does He pray for? *Unity* – that we are one with each other, as Jesus is one with His Father.

Why unity? *So that the world may believe that You have sent Me*. Unity is vital to the purpose of the Church; our Mission and Vision are impossible to fulfill without it. Jesus prays that nothing would divide us, so that we can make disciples who believe in Him. Our unity in the gospel makes our message credible and convincing. And it's a responsibility for every individual member. Perhaps our daily prayer should be – *"Father, lead me toward unity and away from self-centeredness and division."*

"People look at Christians before they look at our creed. They form their opinions about our religion when they see how we behave. If they like the

melody, they will listen to our words. If what they hear is discord, then the lyrics of our faith seldom register in their lives."

Unity means choosing one another instead of choosing sides. We show unity by our love. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:34-35). The world will know that we are disciples of Christ by how we treat one another, and this behavior **must be evident** in our lives, not just a belief.

In an environment of hostility, persecution, and division, the first church was recognized by uncharacteristic compassion, generosity, selflessness, and boldness. They captured the attention of their pagan neighbors through their character, morality, work ethic, charity, and friendship. They regularly took in orphans in a society that placed little value on children. And when the plague rampaged their cities, and everyone else escaped to the countryside, Christians stayed, cared for the sick, and buried the dead. The world knew and recognized Christians through their actions and the world will know to whom is our allegiance by how we treat, respond to, serve, forgive, and talk about one another.

Jesus chose not to fix the systemic inequities rampant in the first-century Near East, but, He did address the immediate needs of those around Him. To love others the way Jesus loves them requires us to stand in the messy middle, to get close, to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). Shouldering the burden of another allows us to be less judgmental, to let go of our assumptions and solutions and ask ourselves – *"How can I put this person first? What does love require of me? How can I love this person, the way Christ loves me?"* When Christ is the center of my life, I bring unity to divisive conversations and seek solidarity and common ground when asked to choose sides.

Unity and love - this is what we should be known for.

- based on thoughts from the Chief Apostle

I am sometimes told or even reproached: As Chief Apostle, you should be very concrete and deal with problems in concrete terms; say very specifically what we should do in this, in that, and in such a situation. What is the position of the Church in this matter?

So we can't give specific advice on who to vote for, what to do, how to spend your money, how to behave on this or that issue - for example, with immigrants, with strangers, with the environment. As soon as we say something about it, we lose half of the audience, who say: "No, they're on that side, and that's not my side" - and the message is lost. We want to be responsible Christians. We want to grow into the image of Jesus Christ, and this is not about rules to follow, but about our own convictions. The inner being should grow, the new creature should develop within us.

The task of the apostolate is to say: This is the gospel. It is now your self-responsibility, your personal responsibility to check whether your ideas, your attitude, actions and words are in line with the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is the gospel. Now it is up to you to make sure whether it fits the gospel or not. That is your responsibility. We are supposed to be responsible Christians, we have to decide for ourselves... You have the gift of the Holy Spirit, you have it precisely so that you can test yourself, check yourself: "What I say, what I mean, what I do - does it actually fit in with the gospel?" And if you listen to the Holy Spirit He will tell you. So that is our own responsibility. Why am I saying this? I say it because it is time for us to remember that Jesus Christ sent us into this world to be His witnesses.