

## **What does it mean as a church to pray for our leaders when we think another Christian's political view is misguided – or even sinful?**

Some would say that the road to unity is apathy; if our political, or indeed theological, differences are trivial, then working together is easy. But this is an unreal response to the real world: cheap unity like cheap grace. Significant political decisions have a real impact, particularly on the poorest and most vulnerable. To unite around the irrelevance of these decisions is to unite around our ability to insulate ourselves from their consequences, rather than around Christ. The letter of James is scathing about wealthy apathy, warning that it will not be overlooked by God (James 5:1 – 6). Our unity can't mean that politics doesn't matter.

But does this mean we want a partisan church? Theologian and writer C.S. Lewis wrote the essay *Meditation on the Third Commandment* on this danger. There he argues that the third commandment (“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God” – Deuteronomy 5:11) is breached when we declare a political movement to be the Christian option. Such a movement will always exclude Christians who disagree with it, so mistaking the part for the whole, misusing the name Christian. Thus weakened, it will inevitably lash itself to a bigger non-Christian project, and become unable to speak for God when that project goes against God's will.

The middle way seems to be politically active Christians, but a non-partisan church. We can all [use our voice in public life](#), and a non-partisan church makes it all the more important that [some Christians take a stand on partisan issues](#). However, this does mean that when Christians gather together to pray, we will be praying alongside those with whom we deeply disagree.

### **Faith, hope, love and disagreement**

So what does it look like to worship together in spite of our differences? First, we unite around our shared faith in God. We express this by praying together for God's wisdom for our leaders. To those who strongly disagree with these leaders, such a prayer may sound like apathy: a prayer for mere competence regardless of good or evil. But biblical wisdom is much deeper than that. To be wise is not merely to be competent, but to know and submit to God (Psalm 2:10 – 12), and to His Christ, far above all rule and authority (Ephesians 1:21). Whether we see a politician as a second Solomon (1 Kings 3:1 – 28) or a new Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:28 – 37), we pray together for the same God-given wisdom, and let God determine the form that this wisdom will take.

Secondly, we hope and pray together for Christ's return, when all things will be made new (Revelation 21:1 – 5). A text called the *Didache* gives us the prayers which some early Christians used at Communion: “Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.”

This prayer tells us that the church is not a field of wheat pretending to be a loaf of bread. Whether through division in the congregation, or through differences in the wider church which our congregation doesn't reflect, we recognise our own present disunity. And this should drive us to pray, for ourselves and all the Lord's people (Ephesians 6:18). But, together, we also look ahead to Christ's return, and are sent out to live in its light. This

togetherness may be painful if we disagree politically, but it reminds us each week that we have a very different story from those who find their identity in their politics.

Finally, we love one another as Christ loved us (John 15:12). It's worth noting that Jesus ties reconciliation to worship in Matthew 5:23 – 24, and Paul sees forgiveness and forbearance along with worship as part of being God's people (Colossians 3:12 – 17). Loving others is, therefore, more than just living with them and worshipping alongside them. While we hear a lot about silos in church and elsewhere, we actually have plenty of access to other views. The real problem is that we're tempted to build narratives that demonise those who differ from us. It is these narratives that prevent good disagreement more than lack of knowledge, we're divided not by stone walls but by straw men. Love seeks to overcome these narratives.

This doesn't mean we'll always be able to work together in spite of any difference. Some political viewpoints, for example, would prevent the church from being the church, and in such cases of conflict "we must obey God rather than human beings" (Acts 5:29). But, for every such fundamental political disagreement, there will be many which are not. And whatever the level of our disagreement, we can let love govern it rather than obscure it – a love that does not dishonour others (1 Corinthians 13:5) but may persuade them.

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

<https://www.eauk.org/news-and-views/prayer-amid-political-disagreement>