

EFFECTIVE PRAYER: FOR THE STATE

I Timothy 2:1-6

(NLT) "I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. ² Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. ⁵ For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. ⁶ He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time."

INTRODUCTION

By November 8 of 2016, many in this country were grateful the election for the President of the United States would soon be over, regardless of who won. Texas Senator Ted Cruz became the first major contender to announce his candidacy nearly 20 months earlier, March 23, 2015. The final results, with Donald J. Trump capturing 30 states and 306 electoral votes, to Hilary Clinton's 232 electoral votes, stunned much of this nation and most of the industrialized world! Just think of the obstacles Trump overcame before he could be sworn in as our nation's 45th President on January 20, including: 1) The massive baggage of his past, including the release of a vulgar video with his tremendously offensive sexual comments along with numerous women accusing him of sexual assault; 2) His myriad campaign errors, with enough misstatements and inappropriate remarks to sink several candidates; 3) A very strong Republican field, including governors like Bush, Christie, Kasich, Huckabee and Walker, senators like Cruz, Rubio and Santorum, and outsiders like Carson and Fiorina; 4) The massive power of the Clinton political machine; and 5) The overwhelming collusion of the mainstream media in behalf of nearly everyone but Donald Trump!

Did God have a hand in Trump's election; and, if so, why? Today's sermon will explore these questions as we consider Why We Pray for the State and Why Our Prayers for the State Matter. Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, was among six members of the clergy asked by President Trump to pray at his Inauguration, the most to pray at any Inauguration in U. S. history. He told *Fox News'* Abby Huntsman on January 8 that President-elect Donald Trump's election was largely a result of answered prayers. During Franklin's 2016 tour holding prayer rallies at all 50 state capitols, thousands prayed for God to change the direction of the country. "[Americans wanted] somebody in the White House that believed in God, and would listen to God's voice." He said secularists have gained control of the Federal Government over the past number of years, and they have pushed a more humanistic, atheist agenda. "I believe God's hand was in it," he said of the election, "I'm not a Republican nor a Democrat, I'm just a follower of Jesus Christ."

A small American town had historically been "dry" (no alcoholic beverages were sold). Then a local businessman decided to build a tavern. A group of Christians from a local church were concerned and planned an all-night prayer meeting to ask God to intervene. Soon after the tavern was built, lightning struck it and it burned to the ground. The tavern owner sued the church claiming the congregation's prayers were responsible for this "act of God." The church hired a lawyer to argue in court they could not be held liable for this "freak event." After his initial review of the case, the presiding judge stated, "No matter how this case comes out, one thing is clear: the tavern owner believes in prayer and the Christians do not." The confusion this court case exposed over who most believes in God or prayer typifies reactions to our Presidential Election. The One News Now website asked the question, "How do you describe the election of Donald Trump?" Of the 8,004 total voters, this is how they responded: Providential-36%; Hopeful-25%; Merciful-17%; Historic-11%; Stunning-8%; Risky-4%. How do you respond to this question?

David Gushee is a pastor, Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics and Director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University in Georgia; and a Hilary Clinton supporter. His *Religion News Service* article, *Discovering the Other America We Did Not Know*, ran November 10, 2016

(<http://religionnews.com/2016/11/10/donald-trumps-america/>). He states: "Everything I knew was going to happen did not happen. Everything I understood about America I did not understand. Like most other members of the commentariat [collective term for news commentators & analysts], I had no idea what I was talking about. I repent in dust and ashes. Donald J. Trump understood America better than any other political candidate in 2016, better than any of the minions of commentators who bloviated [pompously spoke] about him, better than all the learned academics who were sure that America would never elect him to be president. [Despite] periodically using rhetoric that many of us considered to be immoral and some experienced as personally terrifying. . . . he won, besting the entire Republican establishment, Democratic establishment and Clinton dynasty. . . . [T]hose who thought it couldn't happen must now face the music."

Dr. Larry Poland is an evangelical, Bible-believing follower of Christ. He founded Mastermedia International in 1985 to provide a positive liaison between media leaders and the Christian community. In his *Washington Times'* article of November 13, 2016, Donald Trump's Secret God Vote, Dr. Poland wrote, "For the evangelical voter, this ballot box decision was about as comfortable as being water boarded. After the tapes of the Donald's obscene boasts about his sexual assaults and his outrageous comments about Muslims and Hispanics, Hillary's rather superficial Methodist claims looked pretty good. . . . Mr. Trump was personally and morally unacceptable." But "Then, quite apart from her serial prevarication, decades-long involvement in various corruption capers, and possibly felonious actions as secretary of State, Hillary supported the Big Three no-no's of the biblical Christian faith. The Big Three, of course, are abortion on demand, institutionalized sexual deviancy in various forms, and Supreme Court judicial appointments which would overturn a host of 5-to-4 religious freedom decisions that largely are still in place because of Antonin Scalia, now deceased. Mrs. Clinton was by policies and by character unacceptable." Thus, "What started out as a devil's choice for evangelicals became a movement to save the faith in America. The awful electoral choice pitted lies and corruption on one side against vulgarity, bigotry and narcissism on the other. It put the devout in a bind of conscience like no other presidential race in memory . . . if ever."

Rev. William Owens founded the Coalition of African-American pastors in 1993 for these purposes: "Supporting the role of religion in American public life, protecting the lives of the unborn, and defending the sacred institution of marriage." Rev. Owens marched with Civil Rights leaders in the 1960s to end racial discrimination. He appeared last Sunday, January 15, on the *Fox Report Weekend* to explain why he applauded Donald Trump's Presidency despite the refusal of many black lawmakers to attend his Inauguration. He cited Hilary Clinton's speech at the Women in the World Summit on April 23, 2015, when she declared, "Rights have to exist in practice, not just on paper. Laws have to be backed up with resources and political will. And deep seated cultural codes, religious beliefs and structural biases have to be changed." Reverend Owens believes Hilary's determination to complete the job begun by President Obama of insisting we must change our religious beliefs if they conflict with the Federal Government's agenda for our nation is what doomed her candidacy, not any supposed interference of the Russians against her. Rev. Owens, who met with President-elect Donald Trump three times, calls upon Americans of every faith and race "to respect the law" and "give Mr. Trump a chance."

Professor David Gushee noted the bewilderment filling the pages of the *New York Times* and *National Public Radio* the day after the election. He prepared himself for meetings with academic leaders in which over 90% opposed Donald Trump on the basis of what they considered to be "good and noble values" and are convinced of the "idiocy" of all who supported him. He continued, "As human beings, we all face a basic choice — whether to remain in relationship with those who voted differently than we did or to cast them into outer darkness for having done something that is from our viewpoint incomprehensible. As the pastor of a politically mixed Baptist congregation outside Atlanta, I will look out on a sea of faces Sunday and I will know that both Americas are gathered before me. . . . I will need to plead with them not to break relationships over an election but instead to remain in the conversation with each other. I will need to

project a vision of church as an alternative political community — gathered for common mission and witness despite all kinds of earthly differences and regardless of the ebb and flow of daily politics."

Dr. Michael Brown is a Jewish believer in **Jesus**. He hosts the nationally syndicated talk radio program "Line of Fire." He serves as president of FIRE School of Ministry in Concord, NC. He's an associate professor at a number of seminaries and is the author of 25 books. His *One News Now* column of November 9, 2016, is entitled, Donald Trump—President by the Sovereign Intervention of God. Dr. Brown states: "To be sure, some will say, 'Yes, God has raised up Donald Trump, but it is to judge America, not bless America. He has given us what we deserve, and it is not good.' That is certainly a possibility – and either way, Trump's many negative qualities are still glaring and our nation remains terribly divided. But if, indeed, God has raised Trump up for certain divine purposes, it behooves us to ask what those purposes are."

Before we consider our two sermon points, here are a few political light bulb jokes to lighten the tone of this message: How many politicians does it take to change a light bulb? Since they rarely change anything without first appointing a study committee, it can take anywhere from between 6 to 12 politicians to change a light bulb. How many politically correct people does it take to change a light bulb? None. Why should we impose our values on the light bulb? If it wishes to be a light bulb of no light, we should respect its uniqueness and individuality. How many Democrats does it take to change a light bulb? None. They'll just pass a law against light bulbs and then wonder why it's dark. How many Republicans does it take to change a light bulb? Just one, but millions will volunteer to get rid of anything dark.

I. WHY WE PRAY FOR THE STATE

I Timothy 2:1-6 reveals we are derelict in our Christian duties if we do not pray for our civil and community leaders [reread]. A "first" (top) priority of all Christ's followers, according to God's Word, is to pray for our elected and appointed leaders—for anyone who can impact the extent to which Biblical moral principles of our common Creator that undergird our political liberties are supported or opposed in our society—so we might have the most freedom to openly live out our faith as Christians and to reach out to others to embrace **Jesus Christ** as personal Lord and Savior, without interference of public authorities. Your Bulletin insert, How to Pray for Our Leaders, can assist you in this vital prayer effort.

II. WHY OUR PRAYERS FOR THE STATE MATTER

In January 2013, Aaron & Melissa Klein were joyfully operating Sweet Cakes by Melissa in Gresham, OR, a town of 110,000 just east of Portland. They were thrust into national headlines when they declined making a cake for the wedding of two lesbians, on grounds this violated their Christian convictions. They believed the U. S. Constitution's First Amendment guaranteed their "free exercise" of religion. Melissa made cakes in Christian love for homosexuals seeking cakes for other occasions. Many other bakeries were available to this lesbian couple, another bakery made their cake, and they married in June. But one of them filed a complaint in August, 2013, with the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries. The Oregon law the Klines allegedly violated—Oregon Equality Act of 2007—contains exemptions for religious organizations and schools for sexual orientation issues, but the State does not consider religion to be relevant when it comes to Christian-owned businesses. In July, 2015, Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian ordered the Kleins to pay \$135,000 in damages to the lesbian couple and to seek rehabilitation counseling. Just before Christmas, the State of Oregon seized every penny of their personal funds. After numerous protests and death threats against them, the Kleins closed their storefront bakery. They continue to operate their bakery from their home while their case is now in the hands of the Oregon Court of Appeals.

Even should Aaron and Melissa Klein win their case in Oregon, something more sinister is brewing at the national level. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency established by Congress in 1957. Its duties include appraising federal laws and policies with respect to discrimination or denial of equal protection of the laws because of "race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national

origin, or in the administration of justice." These are all commendable goals Christians generally applaud. But on September 14, 2016, the Commission released a three-year study entitled *Peaceful Coexistence: Reconciling Nondiscrimination Principles with Civil Liberties*. This 306-page report has added "sexual orientation, and gender identity" to the civil rights the Federal Government must protect. Commission Chairman, Mario Castro, an appointee of Barack Obama, insists, "The phrases 'religious liberty' and 'religious freedom'" are often "code words for discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia," and other forms of "intolerance. Religious liberty was never intended to give . . . a veto power over the civil rights and civil liberties of others." In other words, woe unto the person of any religious faith who refuses to recognize a formerly perverse action as commendable once the state declares it is commendable.

How far will such thinking become a battering ram against any article of Christian conduct that opposes what civil governments in the United States are now insisting must be approved? California, Oregon, New Jersey, Vermont, and Washington, D. C. have already passed laws that prohibit state-licensed mental health providers from helping a minor overcome same-sex attraction or transgender compulsions, even when the minor and both parents seek such counseling! A careful check of the 2016 Platforms of the Democratic (http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/papers_pdf/117717.pdf) and Republican Parties ([https://prod-cdn-static.gop.com/media/documents/DRAFT_12_FINAL\[1\]-ben_1468872234.pdf](https://prod-cdn-static.gop.com/media/documents/DRAFT_12_FINAL[1]-ben_1468872234.pdf)) present the glaring contrasts between the positions of Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump, and all members of the U. S. Congress, on such crucial issues as religious liberty, marriage, gender identity, and abortion. It's up to us, politically informed and Christ-centered voters, to support our leaders of every political and religious persuasion as they uphold our common Creator's guidelines for personal and political liberty, and to hold them accountable when they renege on their promises that gained them our support. Prior to this past Election, 70% of Americans believed our country was heading in the wrong direction on most matters vital to our security and prosperity. God has given us a chance, a breathtaking window of opportunity, to support our leaders to turn us around and back toward Him!

When Joe Kennedy became head football coach at Washington State's Bremerton High School in 2008, he was inspired by the Christian movie *Facing the Giants* to kneel and pray privately at the 50-yard line immediately after every game. For his first seven seasons, he did so without interference, praying for about 30 seconds each time. Sometimes his players or even opposing players joined him voluntarily. He never recruited anyone to join him, so he believed the U. S. Constitution gave him this right to pray. In September 2015, administrators informed him prayer by any District employee was forbidden at any activity involving students and students should never participate. Kennedy initially complied, until he became convicted he'd violated his vow to God. He was at first suspended and then fired for resuming his post-game prayer. First Liberty Institute, a law firm that advocates for religious freedom, filed a suit to regain his job. Among other things, the suit mentioned an assistant coach regularly engaged in a Buddhist chant at midfield after games without reprimand. As a Marine who fought in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the First Gulf War, Kennedy witnessed religious persecution firsthand. He believed he fought for a Constitution that protected religious liberty. His case is now pending on appeal with the 9th U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which rarely protects freedom of religion for Christians. While still President-elect, Donald Trump called the Bremerton District's treatment of Kennedy "outrageous" and said, "it's very unfair what they're doing to religious freedom in this country." "I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. ² Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and pleases God our Savior."