



# Point of View

Dear Marketplace Friend,

Over the last 20 years, I have spent thousands of hours in front of crowds - on Sunday mornings, and at other times of the week, as well - telling them what I really believe. Each of those settings was wrapped in a "nonprofit, Christian ministry" package. That isn't a free-for-all territory; that ministry space has rules...

When you are granted "tax exempt status," there are certain freedoms you agree to forego; among them is the avoidance of any incursion into the space that would be deemed "political." Actions or commentaries made to the direct benefit of any particular candidate or party are, clearly, "over the line," so far as the enforcers of the not-for-profit frontier are concerned...

That's what it takes to be "legitimate" in the eyes of the United States government. But there's an even more important question to explore: what does it take to be "legitimate" in the eyes of God? It's one thing to have your offering plate approved by the IRS; the bigger issue is whether or not your pulpit is approved by the GOD.

All those utterances over all those years, and I don't know that I've ever been quoted as much as Jeremiah Wright has been quoted in the last few days. One fiery defense from his church - offered in support of their



now-retired but still-revered leader - says that his comments have been taken "out of context." I don't need to restate what you've already heard rewound *ad nauseum*.

All three candidates - Obama, Clinton, McCain - are now finding it necessary to unpack their various endorsements and examine their endorsers' entanglements. When Famous Person says, "I support Whoever for President," anything Famous Person ever said - anywhere, anytime - is now presumed to be in agreement with Whoever's personal position. It's getting to the point that endorsements need to be vetted for banal acceptability. Controversy is only welcomed when it comes from policy positions, expressed on the stump or in a debate. Controversy stemming from collaboration is destructive to candidacy in the internet era...

So, what should those (we) pulpit pounders be saying this year? Where is the "safe zone" in the sermon space? What topics

won't be toxic leading up to the November election?

If political commentary was to be included in the preaching portfolio, surely Jesus would have been on-record with some doozies. Raised in 1st Century Israel - with freedom curtailed Roman occupation - he was surrounded by an ethnic/religious people group existing under duress, awaiting a Messiah who would establish a governmental solution to their greatest felt needs. If Jesus was going to connect with the crowd, what would he have to say about Rome?

Here it is, in a nutshell. In a direct conversation with the highest Roman government official in Israel - Pilate - here is what was said, on that Good Friday morning: *"Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'... Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.' 'You are a king, then!' said Pilate. Jesus answered, 'You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.' "* (John 16:33,36-37)

Jesus never avoided controversy, but his most divisive statements - the ones that created the emotionally-charged firestorms that put his life in jeopardy - were along this line, with the Pharisees: *"Who do you think you are?" Jesus replied, 'If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you,*

*but I do know him and keep his word' ... At this, they picked up stones to stone him..."* (John 8:53-39)

Wright is not the issue. Obama is not the issue. McCain and Clinton are not the issue. The only issue on the table from God's perspective - during an election year, during any year - is this: ***do you endorse (accept) the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, and give your full allegiance to him?***

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