



"The thing I hate about an argument is that it always interrupts a discussion."

—G.K. Chesterton

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No End of Debate

Here is today's \$64,000 question: How many presidential debates have been broadcast already? Answer: Fifteen. The follow-up question: Is anyone listening?

This essay is being written in mid-November 2007, and the presidential election does not take place for another year. The Democrats offer a field of eight hopefuls, all trying to win their party's nomination to contend with the victor among the nine Republican candidates. At the same time, the major news outlets and their star talent are salivating over their opportunities to host these primetime events. To date, according to the Neilson ratings, no more than 3.14 million people have been interested enough to watch any one of the debates, which have been running just about once every two weeks since the middle of April. This means that, at this point, only one percent of the U.S. population cares about what the candidates have to say.

To state the obvious, this election cycle has been unusual. The states have been playing a game of one-upmanship to be "pivotal" in the primary season, moving their caucus and primary dates far earlier than they have traditionally been held. Similarly, to get a jump on the expected large field, most of the

potential candidates in both parties placed their names in the hat as much as a year earlier than had been generally done. For instance, Ronald Reagan did not announce his candidacy for President until November 13, 1979, less than a year before the election. Hillary Clinton, however, proclaimed, "I'm in," on January 20, 2007, more than 21 months ahead of the vote. Despite her uncommonly early announcement, she was hardly the first to declare: Former Democrat Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska formally announced his candidacy in mid-April 2006!

Clearly, this looks to become a long, drawn-out election season. With too many candidates, umpteen debates, a host of early primaries, and wall-to-wall coverage by the entire alphabet soup of news outlets, the average American is likely to be either so overwhelmed by the amount of information or so turned off by nitpicking and partisanship that he will tune out early. Perhaps he will tune back in once the parties' conventions choose the final two nominees, but on the other hand, many may by then be so disenchanted by the candidates and the process that nothing will draw them back. Voter apathy may well set in.

Why has this election cycle turned out this way? Not to sound conspiratorial, but is this early-and-often debate schedule part of a plan to disaffect Americans' involvement in the political process? Are the debates designed to make voters sick of the whole mess and stay home on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November 2008? Low voter turnout tends to favor the status quo, giving a leg up to incumbents, with their greater name-recognition and record of accomplishment. Since the trend since the last presidential election has been Democratic—with Democrats gaining control of both houses of Congress in the mid-term elections in 2006, owing to the unpopularity of "Bush's War" in Iraq—the "Blue Party" would seem to have an advantage in 2008.

For now, at least, the focal point remains on the seemingly endless debates. The news is full of analyses of who won and who drew blood from one or the other candidate. Are the "boys" being too mean to poor Hillary Clinton? Is Barack Obama black enough? Will Mitt Romney's Mormonism hurt his chances? Are any of them experienced enough? Where do they stand on the Iraq War, health care, taxes, Iran, illegals, Social Security, the War on Terror, education, etc.? Was Dennis Kucinich once abducted by aliens? Do

Rudy Giuliani's moderate-to-liberal social views make him unelectable by the Republican base? Is John Edwards too rich to relate to those he professes to speak for—and what shampoo does he use? Did Fred Thompson enter the race too late? Is Ron Paul for real? The questions—and the incessantly argued answers—go on and on and on.

As mentioned earlier, no one really seems to be paying attention, except for the tiny percentage of the citizenry who live for politics. Yet, on the average person, the constant debates will likely have a decidedly negative effect. Not only are they boring and disaffecting, they are also polarizing and entrenching the part of the electorate that is listening. In other words, rather than actually bringing important issues to the fore and educating the public on available and workable solutions to the nation's problems, excessive debate tends to drive people to the extremes and make them inflexible in their views.

The apostle Paul concurs in [Titus 3:9-10](#), telling the evangelist: "But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition." Little good comes from debate, which is, as he mentions here, nothing more than dispute, contention, and striving with words. Debate is a form of conflict—a war of words, the tongue being mightier than the sword—and people take sides, dig trenches, and do their best to bloody the enemy. While not all conflict is evil, the spirit and intent of the conflict in most debates brand them as destructive and divisive. Paul later tells Timothy, "But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife" ([II Timothy 2:23](#)).

The ongoing political debates will do nothing more than harden the divide between the factions that comprise this nation, and that bodes ill for America. The classic strategy of divide-and-conquer seems to be at work in the United States, weakening the country at a time in history when it needs to be strong. The road ahead appears to be strewn with obstacles that this still-powerful nation may have a difficult time navigating through.

What can we do in the meantime? Paul advises in [I Timothy 2:1-2](#): "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority,

that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence." Doing so will make for a good start—and perhaps less debate.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Debate](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

We in the church should side neither with the progressive (liberal) worldview nor the traditional (conservative) worldview, but march to the beat of a different drummer. Americans, as part of the culture of Israel, debate absolutely everything. The Bible takes a very dim view of argument, debate, discord, and strife. In all matters of contention, but especially in matters of doctrine, we must strive to put ourselves above the fray. Regarding verbal dispute, we are no match with someone imbued with a satanic spirit. Those who perpetually dispute and wrangle probably are tares with no trace of God's Holy Spirit. Like the archangel Michael, we must put the battle in God's hands, equipping ourselves with protective defensive spiritual armor.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Should We Pray for the World?](#)

by Staff

Some in the church believe that Christians should not pray for those in the world because of a few verses in Jeremiah. However, the bulk of the Bible shows just the opposite! Only when God has determined He will not relent will prayers for them be ineffective.

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