



September 15, 2011

Pastors Express Opinion on IRS

The practice of separation of Church and State has been largely observed in the US for many years now. But in recent times, we have seen numerous occasions where the distinction has been somewhat blurred. Ministers have openly criticized or supported politicians or aspiring politicians running for elections, and the government taking some form of punitive action against any church seen as supporting or opposing candidates in public office. A recent survey was carried out to gather the views of pastors on this matter.

According to the survey conducted by LifeWay Research in August, 79% of Protestant pastors 'strongly disagreed' while 7% 'somewhat disagreed' with the statement, "The government should regulate sermons by revoking a church's tax exemption if its pastor approves of or criticizes candidates based on the church's moral beliefs or theology." The survey was conducted among 1,000 Protestant pastors and sponsored by the Alliance Defense Fund.

In 2010, LifeWay also conducted an earlier survey in which pastors were asked their views on using the pulpit to endorse a candidate for public office. The result was a majority of pastors disagreed with using the pulpit for such a purpose. 70% of pastors 'strongly disagreed' while another 14% 'somewhat disagreed' with the statement "I believe pastors should endorse candidates for public office from the pulpit."

But what does the American public think of this debatable subject? Should pastors and ministers use the pulpit as a platform to express their political opinions? In June 2008, a survey done by LifeWay Research found that 84% of adult Americans disagreed with the statement, "I believe it is appropriate for pastors to publicly endorse candidates for public office during a church service."

But the part of the problem is that most pastors do not see themselves as inclined to use the pulpit to endorse or oppose any person in public office. In October 2008, LifeWay found that less than 3% of pastors agree they have publicly endorsed any political candidate from the pulpit that year.

Ed Stetzer, Vice President of research and ministry development at LifeWay Christian Resources said, "Pastors and church people have strong feelings when it comes to moral issues that some consider political, and historically churches have played a significant role in shaping political opinions. Pastors, however, clearly don't think the pulpit is the place for politics, nor do they think the church is the place for the IRS." The issue of religion has featured strongly in the 2012 Presidential elections. Many candidates have been asked about their religious faith and how it influences their stand on governance issues.