



The Legislature is gone for another year. It is now campaign time across our state. There will be “yard” signs, campaign ads, radio spots, television commercials, and political speakings from one end of Mississippi to the other.

Whether an incumbent or newcomer, whether seeking re-election or running for a different office, candidates will be knocking on your door, seeking your support and your vote. This is a great opportunity for you and me to engage them in meaningful conversation about vital issues and their position on those issues. You can then hold their feet to the fire if and when they get elected. When they approach you seeking your vote, it is a golden opportunity to talk with them about their relationship with Jesus Christ.

People “complain” about the campaign. Why not take advantage of the opportunity to exercise your civic duty

and Christian witness? We live in a representative democracy — a republic. What a privilege and responsibility to participate in the whole process of electing our leaders. In a totalitarian dictatorship, you would not be “bothered” by candidates and campaigns.

There is a stewardship every Christian is accountable to fulfill. A good football team must recruit good athletes. We need good men and women running for public office. When a good person puts himself out there to run for public office, he or she deserves encouragement and support (moral and monetary). Find a candidate (not perfect, but principled) who is wise, honest, and spiritual. Help with his campaign — be

a volunteer — get involved. The best way to have the ear of an elected official is to get to know the candidate.

I ran for the State Senate in 2007 to communicate one simple truth. If I could run for public office, anyone can. But I realize most won’t. However, anyone can get involved in the process — and should. If we are to be salt and light in the world, Christians should be salt and light in the election process.

Everyone can and should vote. To not vote is a sin of omission. Some discourage voting when they talk about choosing the “lesser of two evils.” I prefer the “better of two choices.” No two candidates are identical; no candidate is perfect; but we are obligated to support

and vote for the candidate who is the better of the two or more.

I have taught the Annual Bible Study in Revelation 1-3 ten times. Jesus said the church at Laodicea was lukewarm. Jesus said he had rather Laodicea be cold or hot (Revelation 3:15-16). Don’t stay home on election day. Don’t ignore the process. Go vote! Cold or hot is better than lukewarm. Get involved.

Religious Liberty is a precious, precious entity. Saints and soldiers have given their lives to preserve our Religious Liberty. We must not take it for granted. We must exercise it. We must value it. We must treasure it. We must guard it. Religious Liberty — use it or lose it. GO VOTE!

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Use It or Lose It

BIBLIOPHER

FZYIZ VAGMHN FYVMFQ ZMHQAQ,

PKV TMN P LNAOAKIA UPWA SMKE

LNPCANQ: OZAQA QZPSS NAIAYGA

ENAPOAN VPUKPOYMK.

UPNW OFASGA: TMNOC

Clue: $U = M$

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week’s puzzle: Luke 6:9

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Religious liberty fight far from over, advocates say

WASHINGTON (BP and local reports) — Religious liberty’s latest setback at the U.S. Supreme Court in an ongoing face-off with sexual liberty is disappointing but may not prove conclusive, Southern Baptist religious freedom advocates predicted.

The high court opted not to review a Hawaii Court of Appeals decision against Aloha Bed and Breakfast in Honolulu, whose owner Phyllis Yung declined to rent a room to a same sex couple. By passing on the case, the high court justices permitted the lower court ruling to stand.

A lesbian couple brought suit against Young after she refused them a room and instead referred them to another establishment. Young, because of her Roman Catholic faith, does not rent the bedrooms of the house in which she lives to any couple other than a married man and woman.

A circuit court judge ruled that Young violated the state’s non-discrimination requirement by refusing the couple based on their sexual orientation.

A three-judge panel of the appeals court upheld the lower court opinion that the bed and breakfast in Young’s home qualified as a public accommodation, like a hotel, and her right to exercise her religion freely under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was not violated.

Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) in Nashville, said he was disappointed at the Supreme Court’s refusal to accept the appeal.

“At stake was the First Amendment rights of a retiree,” Moore told Baptist Press (BP) in written comments. “Even more at question was the court’s commitment to religious liberty.”

The ERLC filed a friend-of-the-court brief in November requesting the U.S. Supreme Court review the appellate opinion and reverse it. The brief urged the justices to clarify the protections for religious liberty they appeared to espouse in previous decisions involving same sex marriage.

“Our brief to the court pointed out that the opinions in both *Obergefell* and *Masterpiece Cakeshop* promised that religious liberty would be honored,” Moore said. “By refusing to take this case, the court decided not to elaborate on those promises. That’s regrettable.”

In the 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* opinion, the high court legalized same sex marriage but said individuals and organizations would still be able to practice their religious beliefs regarding sexuality and marriage.

The court ruled in a 2018 decision — *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* — that the state vio-

lated owner Jack Phillips’ religious free exercise in penalizing him for declining to design and decorate a cake for the wedding of two men.

Michael Whitehead, a Southern Baptist lawyer in suburban Kansas City, Mo., filed the brief in collaboration with his son Jonathan, also a Southern Baptist and a current ERLC trustee. They contend they do not understand the denial of the appeal “to mean that a super-majority of justices believe non-discrimination laws will always trump religious freedom of business owners.”

“Five conservative justices will be looking for the right case to expand the victory for religious liberty in *Masterpiece Cakeshop*,” Michael Whitehead told BP in an e-mail. “If there were not four votes to hear Aloha B&B, it only means that the conservatives believe this is not the best fact pattern to garner five or more votes for religious freedom.”

“At the right time, the right facts will attract four votes to grant [review] and five votes to move the needle in favor of religious freedom.”

The lower court rulings show civil rights agencies and state courts “seem to be on a mission to force people of faith to violate their conscience or go out of business,” Michael Whitehead said.