

JULY 2004—*Learning to Discern*

The political season is hard upon us, and all the parties are launching waves of claims, counter-claims, assertions, and statements—complete with numbers. The difficulty is in discerning what, if any, truth is being spoken.

Benjamin Disraeli once said, “There are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies and statistics.” For the next few months we can anticipate a heavy dose of all three, plus much specious reasoning.

What are we to do as followers of Jesus Christ?

First, we must remind ourselves that we belong to the Kingdom of God and that our first and foremost allegiance is to Christ and his kingdom, not a particular political party.

Second, we should *think* and *reason* clearly about the issues. This may sound obvious, but in contemporary American society it is exceedingly difficult to do, for believers and unbelievers alike.

Among the reasons for this is the prevalence of what C.S. Lewis called Bulverism. “The modern method [of argument] is to assume without discussion that he [your opponent] is wrong and then distract his attention from this (the only real issue) by busily explaining how he became so silly. In the course of the last fifteen years I have found this vice so common that I have had to invent a name for it. I call it Bulverism.”¹ Lewis goes on to explain, “...Bulver assures us...‘that refutation is no necessary part of argument. Assume that your opponent is wrong, and then explain his error, and the world will be at your feet. Attempt to prove that he is wrong or (worse still) try to find out whether he is wrong or right, and the national dynamism of our age will thrust you to the wall.’...Bulverism is a truly democratic game in the sense that all can play it all day long, and that it gives no unfair privilege to the small offensive minority who reason.”² If we can suspend our prejudices and emotions long enough to reason correctly about the issues, we will be in a better position to discover the truth, regardless of who speaks it.

Third, we are to consider the truth we have discerned about the great issues of the day in the light of God’s word, the values of his kingdom, and the path of faithful discipleship. Then and only then will we be prepared to vote as citizens of the Kingdom of God and not as hapless dupes of faulty reasoning and the “lies, damn lies and statistics” that have become so much a part of modern political life.

*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God,
who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*
James 1:5 NIV

¹ C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 273.

² *Ibid.*, p. 273-4.