

# FOCUS ON FAITH

Stephen G. Derges, Pastor of Bridgnorth Baptist Church



## WAY TO GO

It was back in the 1970's, almost 40 years ago, that former Prime Minister, Harold Wilson quipped, "A week in politics is a long time" indicating how political fortunes and reputations can change extremely rapidly. I guess not much has changed in the intervening period.

This last week has been a tumultuous time for many politicians – at local, national and European levels – and not just because of the elections. I'm just beginning to come to terms with what's been happening as my wife and I have been on holiday in France so we were effectively insulated from the shenanigans and manoeuvrings that have been taking place. Thankfully we were able to cast our votes via the post before we left but it was only our return that we became aware of the full extent of what has been happening and which is still rumbling on.

### ***. . . if art mirrors life, then maybe politics reflects society***

Personally I have admiration for people who put themselves up for election. Of course I realise that whilst many candidates want to serve their communities, regretfully not everyone does so for altruistic purposes – as we have witnessed through the media exposure and revelations about expenses. However everyone who does stand for election puts themselves in the firing line of public scrutiny and debate and has to face the possibility of open judgment, approval or rejection as the votes are counted and the results announced.

Yes, I know that politicians and leaders of all types (even church leaders) have to be thick-skinned. We will never be able to please everyone all the time so criticism and disagreement, even down-right hostility, is inevitable. Let's face it we will never be able to agree about everything – the four of us in my family can't even agree on tastes in music let alone other more weighty matters!

The problem for me though is the issue of differing standards. Now whilst I agree that those in public life should set an example, my question is, "Who isn't in public life to some extent?"

We all influence those around us – parents their children; employers their staff; employees their co-workers and customers or suppliers; teachers those they are educating etc. Each of us is watched, evaluated, admired or disliked. Our attitudes and motivations are scrutinised and assessed – judgments are made about us.

And let's face it, in most situations we only have partial information instead of all the facts. We make our decisions on sound bites and perceptions. If you asked

yourself, "How much did I really know about the candidate I voted for in last week's elections?" you might be surprised with the answer. Probably most of us placed our cross on the paper on the basis of political ideology, possibly as a protest vote or even to prevent another candidate being elected rather than having the full facts about a candidate's personal convictions and having complete trust in them.

A wise man once said to me, "Never criticise someone whose shoes you have not walked in" but I admit I have not always followed that advice. We moan about MPs who "fiddle their expenses" but how many of us have never claimed extra mileage on a business trip; "acquired" an office pen; put personal mail in the company's out-tray instead of buying a stamp or taken advantage of a multitude of other "perks"? You could argue the scale of what's been happening at Westminster is far greater but when it's wrong, it's wrong.

In previous editions of Focus on Faith I've written about integrity which is of course much deeper than just the absence of dishonesty. It includes being honourable and reliable as well as speaking and acting truthfully. Do we expect this of our political leaders? Yes, of course we do but shouldn't it be expected of us all? And when we criticise others for the things we do its double standards. After all, if art mirrors life, then maybe politics reflects society – and that includes us all.

Often there are no clear cut answers but I want to give you a practical suggestion. As a Christian I believe in prayer and the apostle Paul gave this instruction in the Bible, "**Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well**" (1Timothy 2:2 The Message Version). How many of us really pray for those in leadership positions. We may find it easier to pray for those we support but perhaps it's even more important to pray for those we don't support if they happen to be in power.

So for all those who did stand for election – particularly for the new Unitary Authority – thanks for putting yourselves on the line on our behalf. Commiserations to those who didn't achieve the necessary majority and for those of you who did, I trust (and pray) you will be wise in your decision-making and that you will indeed, "**rule well**".

If you'd like to find out more information on local Churches together with contact details, plus information on activities and other Christian resources, please log on to [www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk](http://www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk).