

## Facing an Election, 10/6/24

In a month from now, Americans will be electing our next President. This president will be called to lead our nation through economic challenges such as inflation and housing, the complexities of a border crisis, involvement in two raging international conflicts, potentially the appointment of a supreme court judges who will likely rule on future moral and social issues...just to name a few...this President will lead in the midst of historically low trust in government and deep cultural division. And our choices are Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. As I say all of that, how are you feeling as you face this election on November 5? Anxiety? Hope? Dread? Excitement? Internal Conflict? Exhaustion? This is the range of feelings I have experienced throughout this election. And yet, for Christians the Bible tells us that God is completely sovereign over the affairs of the world, and God is not fearful, anxious, or exhausted. He will accomplish his redemptive plan as he has throughout history even using the evil schemes of man for his ultimate purposes.

Now if we think that God's sovereignty means we bury our heads in the sand and sit this out, we have not properly read our Bibles. We are called to be salt and light in the world, we are agents of God's moral vision and called to bring the kingdom of God to Earth. And so we find ourselves in the tension of these three realities- A massively important, anxiety-inducing election that has major consequences for our nation and world...resting in the sovereign God whose is working all things according to his good purposes...and we have a critical role to play as Christ's ambassadors.

And this tension frames where I want to lead us a church family this morning, I want to share with you **Five Pastoral Principles for Facing an Election** with the goal of equipping you with both practical wisdom and emotional and spiritual resilience using God's Word as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

### **Principle #1 Our Allegiance to Jesus Christ and His Kingdom must supersede our national and political allegiances.**

In Jesus' famous words from **Matthew 22:15-22 Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's**. He was making a profoundly subversive political statement about two kingdoms: the earthly kingdom and heavenly kingdom. In a culture where Caesar what considered a god to be worshiped, Jesus brings him back down to earth. Jesus is saying- give Caesar what you owe him- taxes, obey laws, civic duties...but never give him your worship, never your heart, never give him your highest allegiance...that belongs to God alone. What do we owe to God? Jesus 15 verses later, Jesus says **Matthew 22:37 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength**. He deserves the fullness of our worship, the fullness of our allegiance. A biblical worldview must start here as an anchor for hearts which are easily prone to elevating a politician or party to a status God does not give them, and belongs only to him.

What is the source of your hope in this life? The outcome of an election or the sovereign, reigning, returning Jesus Christ? Chuck Colson "Salvation will never arrive in Air Force One." Which kingdom gets our time, talents and financial treasures? The Kingdom of God, or the kingdom of man? *Matthew 6:21 Where your treasure is, that's where your heart will be. 6:33 Seek first the Kingdom of God.* What gets our passions, voice, our social media engagement and what we talk about with one another? We are capital C Christians before we are lower case d or r or i...

Allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord means that we must be willing to speak out and hold our political leaders accountable. (even those whom we support). When a nation stops holding our leaders accountable even leaders you support, ends will inevitably justify the means and unchecked power will have damaging results. As Christians we cannot hold the party line when the party or a politician is out of line because these parties are not our ultimate allegiance. We must be willing to speak truth when our leaders are lying or living in a manner not befitting a president representing our nation, when their policies are immoral and destructive.

**Principle #2 We have a responsibility to be respectful and productive citizens as representatives of Jesus.**

**Respect Authority as from God.** Romans 13:1 *Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.* And Paul was writing this during Nero's hostile reign. The Bible is clear, our responsibility is to honor and submit to the governing authorities that are over us, because God has allowed/appointed them to govern- Pay taxes you don't want to pay, submit to regulations you find personally restricting...unless they require us to go against the Word of God (Acts 5:29), in which case we obey God not man.

**Productive Citizenship.** Even when the nation of Israel was in exile when they didn't have any political power, listen to God's instruction- *Jeremiah 29:7 <sup>7</sup>Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.* While the context is very different from our democracy, the principle remains, that as Christians, we work according to the higher law of love of God and neighbor, which is to the benefit of our society. Now, we do not have a king. We are the people, "a nation of the people, by the people, for the people" -Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. We express our sovereignty of self-government by productive and responsible citizenship. One of the important ways we do that is by voting. Do you recognize the amazing privilege it is to have a voice through your vote? Christians throughout history and today around the world could only dream about that privilege. And yet 30% of evangelicals don't vote for national elections, and far more do not vote in state and local elections. I want to urge you to vote, it matters, even if doesn't change the outcome in Delaware, and if you live in PA your vote definitely can change the outcome. It's a privilege that Americans literally died for, and civil rights leaders fought for. Don't waste it. But productive citizenship does not end in voting.

It is said that “All politics are local.” For 99.9% of us, this is where our dual citizenship on earth and of heaven will have its greatest impact, in our local community. It may mean advocating, supporting, writing our representatives about bills, protesting when it calls for it, being part of the PTA, or even running for school board, township or city council, etc. I have such respect for those of you who have run for or served in public service.

And, the local church is a community center for exercising productive citizenship. Through the church we learn to love those who are different than us, we care for one another’s needs, we look after the widows and orphans and poor and immigrant- through ESL, Broken Beginnings, Love-in-Action fund, our many ministry partners, we help each other find jobs, and go through grief and a 100 other things that benefit our community. Engage your productive citizenship here!

**Principle #3 While the Bible is not a manual for political engagement, it does provide some “handholds” to navigate political complexities.**

**The Character of our leaders Matters.** Proverbs 29:4 *By justice a king gives a country stability, but those who are greedy for bribes tear it down.*

**Proverbs 16:12** *Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness.*

Man looks on the outside, but God looks at the heart. As Christians- we should not vote based on a candidates’ gender, racial profile, or looks, or personality, charm or charisma, degrees, how much success or money they have, what famous people support them, or what state they are from. These are the things on the “outside”. The picture in the Proverbs of an ideal political leader is one whose character can be trusted. Whose yes is yes and no is no. At the end of their lives, the Kings who ruled Israel were judged by whether they “Did right in the eyes of the Lord” or “Did evil in the eyes of the Lord.” This is the ultimate measuring stick of our government officials. The character of government leaders matters, and should never be dismissed as unimportant. Which candidate and his/her cabinet lives more according to justice and righteousness, less likely to take bribes, more trustworthy that they will do what they say? Now remember, we are talking about national politics. It’s a dirty business and we live in a broken world. While this is a factor, it can’t be the only factor or we wouldn’t vote for anyone. The only king of justice and righteousness is Jesus.

**The role of government is to limit and punish evil and promote what is good for the wellbeing of all its citizens. (Romans 13:3-4)**

This has been a helpful hand hold for me. As I look at each candidate’s platform, policies and values- I ask, “Does this policy push back evil in our nation or make evil continue to grow?” “Does this stance promote flourishing or destruction? Keeping in mind that for the Christian, the definition of good and evil, flourishing and destruction are defined by God, not culture.

Remember- not all political issues are political at their core. Church we must realize that the culture has hijacked the narrative on social and moral issues and turned them into primarily political issues when in reality God has spoken clearly on these subjects long before the words Democrat and Republican were invented. Throughout the history of our nation, there have been moral issues that had political ramifications that regardless of your politics, Christians ought to support or fight against because they are biblical issues before they are political issues. Freedom and protection of worship here and around the world, inherent human dignity, equality and rights whether about slavery in our past, or in the days of eugenics in the 1920s, issues of racism and sexism, or abortion and euthanasia in the last 50 years, or issues of marriage, gender and sexuality.

**Exercise Freedom of Conscience.** Now, not all moral issues can we tie clearly to a political platform or policy. And this is where we need to give grace and freedom of conscience. Godly, well-informed Christians can have differing opinions on these issues. In my view, the vast majority of policies/platforms this election fall into this category.

Let me just give you one example. Welfare, public health- The Bible has much to say about caring for the poor among us, but there is complexity in how to do that well. Should we shrink the government, lower taxes, institution workfare policies and let private capital markets and non-profits allocate more resources to the poor? Or should we expand the government, have higher taxes and give the state more of the power to distribute wealth and health to the poor and needy through social programs? And we could have similar conversations when it comes to health care, immigration, environment, gun control, foreign policy...

I would encourage you to sit down individually or maybe as a family and read through each candidate's stated agenda and platform. <https://kamalaharris.com/issues/> and <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/platform>. Go through their platforms with these handholds we just discussed, I think it will help you gain wisdom as you navigate these complexities.

#### **Principle #4 Our Love and Unity in the Body of Christ is of Utmost importance.**

*John 13:34-35 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" Jesus does not command us to vote, but he does command us to love one another. It's the issue that as your lead pastor, I'm most fiercely loyal to protect and cultivate among us.

One of the greatest threats to the American church today, and one that is addressed in almost every NT letter to the church, is quarreling. **2 Timothy 2:23-24:** "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful."

**Galatians 5:15:** "If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."

Quarreling is insidiously dangerous because it kills from within. When Scripture warns against quarreling, it isn't talking about disagreement on the core doctrines of the faith. It's talking about secondary issues, gray areas, personal convictions. Quarreling is about a negative spirit toward others that makes you resent, judge, mistreat and separate- friendships, sides of the pew, separate churches. **1 John 4:20: "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar."**

**We should seek to have loving, listening, honoring conversations and disagreements.** This summer's class "For the Health of the Nation" was an example of how to do that. Take a brother or sister out for lunch who has a different perspective or political persuasion, have them over for dinner to hear their heart and reserve judgment.

**If you are on team Trump or team Harris, remember we are all on Team Jesus.** And can I just say, this is one of the things I love about our church, we know what unites us- Jesus Christ as Lord. When I was in the interview process, to become lead pastor, there was never a question, "Are you a Republican or Democrat?" And this is not a church built on political platforms. On Sunday, November 10<sup>th</sup> when we gather in church we aren't going to start with a "USA" chant, and nor are we going to sing a dirge. We are going to pray and we are going to preach the Word, and we are going to praise God. My challenge is that even if your candidate loses, can you be like Whos in Whoville who woke up Christmas morning with no Christmas trees and presents...and still found a way to unite together in joy and love and gratitude? If we have Jesus Christ, we have everything that ultimately matters!

**Principle #5 Before and After the Election- Jesus is supremely reigning, sovereign, and will return to bring his kingdom policy.**

**King Jesus Reigns Supreme over His Church (Matthew 16:18)** The Church is God's Plan A, there is no Plan B. The gates of hell, nor any administration, will overcome it. Governments do not dictate the growth of Christianity or the decline of Christianity. Not that we should desire persecution or loss of freedom, keep in mind that under communist China, Christianity has exploded, China is the largest Christian nation in the world. Jesus' goal for you is not ultimately that you would be rich, healthy, comfortable and free to do as you please. It is for you to become a resilient disciple of Jesus.

**King Jesus' Foreign Policy- When Jesus comes to reign, his foreign policy will be universal dominion (Philippians 2:10-11)** This will take place "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

**King Jesus' Social Policy- He will govern with perfect righteousness, justice and love (Isaiah 32:1).** All injustice, evil and violence will be dealt with. Peace in our homes, peace in the streets,

security from economic hardship, human dignity and human flourishing as we were always meant to be.

**King Jesus' Environmental Policy- The restoration of the goodness and glory of creation in the New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 20-21)**

Come Lord Jesus, Come! And so, while we wait for his return- we fix our hopes, dreams, our courage and clarity, our allegiance and identity on Jesus. We look to Him, horses and chariots are a vain hope. We put our trust in Jesus. And we turn to Him in prayer for our nation.

*1 Timothy 2:1-6- I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— <sup>2</sup>for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

*<sup>3</sup>This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup>For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who gave himself as a ransom for all people.*

Paul says, “First of all” prayer is most essential. Paul’s king was Nero, the vilest and most antagonistic threat to Christians in the empire...and yet Paul says pray for Nero. We must pray for our government leaders. We should pray often, Pray as a family around the dinner table. Pray as a church. We are calling for prayer for the nation specifically: **Prayer Gathering next Sunday at 5:30pm.**

Communion

When Jesus stood before Pilate at his trial before he gave his life as a ransom for many, he said, **“My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36).** This King of Heaven came down and made himself a slave of humanity, and servant of earthly kingdoms. Why? So that we could be rescued