



SESSION 2 — A Biblical Worldview for Elections - Pastor Keith & Matthew Barnes -

Most of us are uniquely confused or confounded this year, and most of us are looking for guidance to help us. And this group, in particular, is suited to provide it, for we have the Bible open in front of us and the Holy Spirit within us, and both have been given to us for our guidance. Therefore, while this issue can be provocative and divisive, I believe that this body is uniquely situated to navigate it with both unity and diversity, but discovering true help along the way.

A friend recently asked in a text, “What good is our Christianity if it doesn’t help us with a question as basic as, ‘Who do I vote for/not vote for?’” That’s an excellent point, and I think most of us understand that our Christianity is at least that good, ☺ and indeed it is far better. But tonight, let’s work to discover how a biblical worldview does indeed provide us with guidance for this year’s election, guidance which we all might appropriately apply differently. And there’s the rub, right?! But in this group, we’re also equipped to deal with differences and disagreements, for God’s Word provides guidance there, too.

So, my goal tonight is two-fold.

- **To be biblical** — Personally and pastorally, there are many biblical factors that we need to consider. You and I will be mutually benefitted both by discussing them together. And we may even discover that we’ve overlooked some bigger ideas or that we’ve missed some personal blind spots. Our normal pattern of thinking (about everything, including politics) needs to be suspected, evaluated, and adjusted by the washing of water by the Word.

- **To be gracious** — There are determinations that I need to keep private. There are applications that I need to gently offer. There are judgments that I should not make. There are friendships that I must protect.

So, I embark on this endeavor with fear and trembling, wanting God’s Word to speak to us (and even adjust us) and wanting to guard my spirit.

A STARTING POINT FOR CONVERSATION: CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS

At least three qualities should always govern our conversations with each other, especially when opinions clash and especially when conversations are being had publicly and online.

- **Humility** (trusting, respectful, teachable)
- **Love** (patient, not angry, peaceful)
- **Unity** (It’s a choice!)

These three qualities are bound together in three classic passages on interacting with one another in Christ.

- **Romans 12:9-10, 16-18** — “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”
- **Ephesians 4:1-3** — “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (cf. 4:15, 29-32)
- **Philippians 2:1-3** — “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

We should pursue these qualities individually, and we should assist each other towards this goal mutually. Paul writes in **Philippians 4:2-3**, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel." We're family here tonight—may that never be sacrificed on the altar of opinion or preference. And even personal conviction in this area needs to be held in submission to our partnership and community together. We need to keep the main thing the main thing even when we diverge on secondary things, and we of all people have something much greater that binds us than that which divides us.

A GRID FOR CONSIDERATIONS: A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

1. The purpose of government

Our previous lesson looked in detail at the purpose of government. With those biblical functions in mind, I have a few questions that I like to ask of each candidate that is requesting my vote.

- **Does he understand his purpose?**

I want to vote for a candidate who will "bear the sword" in providing for our physical and moral safety. I want to support a candidate who will take our national security and criminal justice seriously, and I want to support a candidate who has a sense of social justice, a perspective on key social issues, and a moral component that will honor the principle of Proverbs 14:34—"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

- **What is his worldview?**

Having a Christian candidate/ruler helps (1 Timothy 2:1-4), but it is not necessary for the people of God. Nonetheless, a God-fearer is better than a pagan, for many reasons (cf. Proverbs 29:2). And always fair-minded people are better than fickle-minded people (e.g., Darius, etc.).

- **What is his character?**

It was the generation before us that taught us that "character counts." The Bible has much to say about leadership and most of it deals with character. In summary,

it teaches that a leader should be an example, and Proverbs, in particular, offers much warning about specific kinds of characters.

- **Is he competent?**

Since I get to be a part of the decision-making process, I want to cast my vote for someone who has proven capacity to do the job.

2. The responsibility of believers

a. As citizens of heaven

Scripture consistently affirms that you and I are exiles, foreigners, pilgrims here (1 Peter 2:11). Our world (even the GOP) would have you believe that your primary citizenship is in America. But, Christian friend, you know that's not true! "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). Therefore, we have nothing more to win, and it has become painfully clear that American politics is a part of the "world [that] is passing away" (1 John 2:17). It should be a very little thing, then, for us to "lose" anything in that arena.

Because of this superior citizenship, you and I have an undeniable first priority to a Person rather than to a party. In fact, in our pilgrimage, our King commands us maintain Him as preeminent (Colossians 1:18; 2:8-10), to walk by faith and not by sight (Hebrews 11:1, 10, 13, 16), and to be life-and-death loyal to Him (Matthew 10; Philippians 1:20-21).

b. As citizens of America

On the one hand, a patriotic affection for one's country and a desire to influence her is good and right. Romans 9:3 seems to suggest this, when Paul exposes his special burden for "my kinsmen according to the flesh." John Piper references C. S. Lewis' book *The Four Loves* and sees his description of *storge* to fit this idea. He explains, "*Storge* is a kind of affection that you feel for a pair of slippers that you have worn way too many years and your wife wants you to

throw them out. ... You get the idea that there is this kind of affection for a tree or a city or a fatherland or a language or a culture, and it is because it fits you. When you leave it, you get on a plane, you go to another country, yeah, there is an excitement and a challenge and a stimulation of going other places, but there is something inside that, when you come home, it just feels wonderful to eat the food and lie in your own bed and be in your own living room and walk your own streets and hear your own language. All that seems to be something that God puts his approval on. ... It is right to be thankful that we have all these cultural slippers to put on that we don't want to throw away."¹

On the other hand, we can go too far. Piper continues, "Whatever form your patriotism takes, let it be a deep sense that we are more closely bound to brothers and sisters in Christ in other countries, other cultures than we are to our closest unbelieving compatriot or family member in the fatherland or in the neighborhood. That is really crucial to feel that, I think. Otherwise, I think our patriotism is drifting over into idolatry." The French philosopher and theologian Jacques Ellul wrote: "Politics is the church's worst problem. It is her constant temptation, the occasion of her greatest disasters, the trap continually set for her by the prince of this world."²

In our current American context, I believe this temptation is tripping up the current church. America's uniqueness as a nation, founded upon loyalty to biblical principles and enjoying subsequent divine blessing, led the church to incorrectly think of America in theocratic or covenantal terms as a "city on a hill." As a result, the American church has adopted wrong concepts and conclusions into its understanding of Christianity, the church, and the gospel. Now, when Christian control and American prosperity is waning, the church is inappropriately thinking about and fighting for what was never hers in the first place.

3. **The sovereignty of God**

God's Word strongly affirms God's absolute and sole sovereignty over the positioning of political leaders (Daniel 2:21; 4:35; Romans 13:1). But the thing about God's sovereign will is that (1) we don't know it—that is, in this scenario, we don't know if God wants to "win the White House"; (2) we can be certain that it will be accomplished—that is, I cannot mess it up with what some might deem to be an ill-advised vote, nor can I manipulate it with my strategy; and (3) we can be sure that it is best—although it might differ with our definition of "best."

I recently preached on Isaiah 10 and was reminded to rely on the Lord alone, and not on any tool that God might use (v. 20). That was convicting to me because we all are prone to rely on non-Jesus Saviors—and in this election, that often looks like either trusting in a candidate too much or trusting in defeating a candidate too much. Salvation belongs to the Lord—not in getting someone into or keeping someone out of the White House.

4. **The hope of the gospel³**

We are the gospel people! And since the gospel is "of first importance" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), we need to consider what it specifically has to say about our vote. These considerations cannot be overemphasized or overstated, for Christ is now our life (Colossians 3:1-4) and His message is our mission (Colossians 1:28-29). Therefore, since our worldview is being recreated by the gospel, we need to consider its ramifications upon our presidential vote, too. I simply want to suggest two applications of the gospel to this issue. Since Christ Jesus "died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures...[and] was raised on the third day," our political motivations should be impacted in two ways.

a. Because of the gospel, avoid voting from a place of fear.

In today's world, fear lurks on every level (personal, relational, national, global) and wears many faces (terrorism, racism, crime, economy, immigration, morality, religion). The more headlines we see, articles we read, stories we hear, and podcasts we listen to, the more fearful we become. Indeed, we have good reason to fear, but that

is also the problem. While fear might arise out of present circumstances, it makes its living off of the future. Fear is powerful in the present because it paints the unknown future and then labels it as “most likely.”

And at that point, fear becomes easy to justify, difficult to control, and difficult to detect. We justify it by thinking we’re being careful, prudent, and prophetic. We fail to control it and soon become “anxious about everything” in violation of Christ’s constant admonition to “fear not.” And we even overlook it because it hides itself behind the loss of many good things and whispers, “What will happen next?”

In any election, candidates often exploit the power of fear along two paths: (1) evidencing the threat to our safety and security and promising to fix it; (2) offering us back a sense of control and prosperity that we have lost.

The gospel rescues us from the power of such exploited fear. It reminds us that earthly safety/security and control/prosperity were never promised to us, and it assures us that that’s okay! Matthew 10:16-39 specifically testifies to these concerns, removing our innocence of what it means to follow Jesus and promising His gracious enablement all along the way. Hebrews 10:19-39 and 1 Peter 1:3-9 embolden us to persevere nonetheless by assuring us that Jesus is worth it and that our position and inheritance are secured in heaven for us.

Since earthly safety, security, control, and prosperity aren’t our lot or mission in life, we can be confident that “in Christ” we’ll be okay when those “ideals” are lost. This confidence stems from the very power of the gospel, for far from being proportionately impacted by the health or corruption of a culture, the impact of the gospel has historically often been intensified in the face of terrible opposition. I am not wishing persecution upon us, but am instead remembering that it was in such a hostile setting that the gospel first sprung from an empty tomb. And that resurrection story turns the chaos, confusion, and fear of any national decline into a promising context for gospel fruit.

Don’t misunderstand me—I want to use my civil responsibility to protect the freedoms in which we’ve been able to minister the gospel in this country, but I do not want to discount the ability of the gospel (e.g., “It’s all over if we lose the White House / Supreme Court!”) or question the goodness of the gospel (e.g., “Yes, he/she is vile, but they’re our only choices!”) or conceal the hope of the gospel (e.g., “Oh no, my party lost, and we’re doomed!”) in the way I do that. And believe me, when I understand that such a conviction might land me in a prison cell in America in the not too distant future, I shudder with terrible fear that threatens that very conviction! Oh God, help me believe, then, in the utter preciousness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the utter worth of defending it, and through it please give me “a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control” (2 Timothy 1:7)!

As God does that—reminding me of unthwartable truth and helping me believe it—those considerations slowly but surely bring me to a position where I can surrender my fear and turn from it as a motivation in November’s vote. Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

b. Because of the gospel, vote from a place of missional distinction.

The political climate in which the gospel first “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) was one equally as ungodly, immoral, pluralistic, intolerant, etc. as our own (or worse). The early church’s determination was never to “win Rome” and enjoy control, but instead to “make disciples” even at the cost of their own lives. Yes, “the Way” had something to say about earthly citizenship and civil responsibility, but it was always to the service of the gospel (cf. Titus 3:1-8—to “adorn” the gospel, Titus 2:10; cf. 1 Peter 2:13—“for the Lord’s sake”).

This election affords gospel-driven Christians with a unique opportunity to hold forth the beauty and hope of the gospel against a political and cultural backdrop that causes it to shine with distinct and compelling brilliance! That’s the

silver lining in this year's election! Everyone knows that neither candidate is even close to being a good solution. Everyone is swallowing hard and hoping against hope for a miracle. Everyone is fearful no matter what happens in November.

Into that despondency and desperation enters a gospel-driven Christian, who knows that America "is not his home, he's just passing through." With grace and truth, he begins to talk about his homeland and the Ruler of that great land. He recognizes that in the confusion and chaos around him, he is uniquely positioned to offer real, distinct, unmitigated hope to hurting people. His vote is driven by his desire to honor and magnify his King, and his voice is emboldened to explain how, in spite of the poor political landscape, he is encouraged by looking above to his homeland and from it "awaiting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). His hope being therefore planted in our *only* chance, he joyfully and confidently takes his theology into the marketplace conversation with him. He testifies with his vote and voice, that there is only *one* "name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

This is a distinct individual indeed, for the gospel has liberated him from fear personally and licensed him to offer a real and lasting alternative publicly. This is the refreshing and life-giving perspective that you and I can offer to our nation at this time.

Christian friend, we have a unique opportunity in this election to make a difference beyond the typical and minimal "my vote, my voice" sentiment. You and I can actually set ourselves apart both from the damnable cultural and from the empty mainstream, political Christianity and offer our nation what it truly needs—"good news," the best news! Our nation is literally (and eternally) dying for lack of "good news," and if we would hold it fast in the midst of the confusion and despair and hostility around us, we might find faces turned our way and ears leaning in, asking us a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15).

ENDNOTES

¹ John Piper, "Should Christians Be Patriotic," desiringgod.org/interviews/should-christians-be-patriotic

² Peter Wehner, "The Theology of Donald Trump," nytimes.com/2016/07/05/opinion/campaign-stops/the-theology-of-donald-trump

³ Keith Lewis, "The Gospel and My Presidential Vote," facebook.com/notes/keith-lewis/the-gospel-my-presidential-vote/10154831750528465