

POST-ELECTION PROCESSING: OLD TRUTHS FOR A NEW PRESIDENCY

1 Peter 2:13-17

We're going to take a break from James tonight and do some post-election processing. But don't worry, friends—we won't be waxing political tonight. There will be no political analysis, no shaming, no pity-partying, no victory speeches. Really, there is no need for us to be political, because we are not a political party and I am not a politician. Instead, we are the body of Christ, the family of God, the household of faith, the pillar and ground of the truth. We are the church, and I am a pastor. Therefore, we have an altogether different focus and mission than what is happening this evening in New York or Washington. Our guidebook is in front of us, our Master is over us, our responsibility is around us, and God's Spirit is within us. God's will has been done in our government, and we thank Him for that. Tonight, we simply want to consider His will for us citizens.

Our goal tonight is to walk together through one New Testament passage that contains universal and timeless counsel. It applied Monday, it applied yesterday, it applies today, and it will apply in January; it applied to a Bush presidency and an Obama presidency, and it will apply to a Trump presidency; it applies in America, and it applies in China. So, while there may be some new or fresh nuances in light of the recent political happenings, what we will consider tonight are old truths.

Last night's election result has been hailed as an historical upset. Analysts are still working to determine why almost all the polls and predictions were incorrect, for President-elect Donald Trump ended up winning handily, as typical Democratic states swung his way and he easily attained the needed 270 electoral votes. When the dust settled, not only did Hillary Clinton fail to triumph as the most liberal and the first female president to date, but also the Republican Party won control of the White House, Senate, and Congress.

This presidential campaign was also historical because of the complexity and confusion into which it hurled the church. Some Christians eagerly supported Donald Trump, as his patriotic slogan resonated deeply with them. Others voted for him reluctantly, prioritizing platform issues over

personal improprieties. Still others voted for him, only because in doing so they were voting against Hillary Clinton. On the other side, some Christians cast their ballot for Hillary Clinton, preferring, they said, to accept predictable evil over unpredictable, or reflecting their rejection of Trump's divisive rhetoric. Then there were many in the #neverhillary/#nevertrump camp who chose not to vote or who voted for a third-party candidate.

Now Jesus reminded us that His "kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Therefore, this election had nothing to do directly with the mission or operation of the church. And yet, partly because there was so much at stake and partly because Christians were using different biblical principles to inform their vote and partly because we are all idolaters in one way or another, the practice of individual soul liberty in this area quickly revealed a breadth of perspectives on what to do. Unfortunately, those same factors and others emotionally energized such diversity of opinion, producing within the church hostile rhetoric, judgmental cynicism, and divided relationships.

Now, the winners are rejoicing and the losers are licking their wounds. And, in the church, we have to learn to live with each other post-election. How do we do that? First, we must start by affirming that "in Christ" there is much, much more that unites us than that which divides us. Second, we must all put on "the mind of Christ" and individually pursue unity through humble ministry (Philippians 2:1-8). A good example of what we should all be working at right now is what Paul wrote 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 together."

To get really practical this evening, I want us to consider a passage of Scripture together that helpfully informs all of us believers—#neverhillary, #nevertrump, #reluctanttrump, #holdyournosetrump, #thirdparty, #notvoting—about what our Master expects from us now (and always) as citizens of a heavenly kingdom but pilgrims in an earthly one (1 Peter 2:11-12). In 1 Peter 2:13-17, we discover four behaviors that we should practice moving forward. In every culture, in any age, under any ruler—these four practices apply.

SUBMIT TO RULERS (vv. 13-15)

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

This applies in an authoritarian dictatorship and in a democratic republic. It applies on the federal level and on the local level. Scripture reveals at least two constant ways in which we should practice such submission.

1. Obey them.

Peter writes, "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people."

Paul puts it this way in Romans 13:1-4, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer."

Christians understand that obedience is more than just an external conformity, but is an internal transformation. Therefore, friends, don't just obey, but obey in the right way. Beware a critical spirit, an ornery disposition, a malicious tongue, a condemning heart. And certainly don't undermine your pro-life mandate by wishing for the demise or death of a ruler. No, submit to your rulers, obey them, and respect them (v. 17d). Paul writes in Titus 3:1-2, "Remind [believers] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people."

2. Pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:1-4, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This

is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

It may be easier to pray for friends, but Jesus extends this command even to our enemies. In Matthew 5, He exhorted, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (Matthew 5:43-47).

What to pray for?

- That they would be saved.
- That they would be given true wisdom.
- That they would be just and fulfill their divine purpose to restrain evil and promote good.
- That they would have good health and strength.

LIVE FREE (v. 16)

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God

But these people weren't free—at least, not nationally or religiously. Nor were they free individually, for they had just been commanded to "be subject...to every human institution." Furthermore, they weren't even free spiritually, for they were "servants of God." What, then, is meant by this paradoxical command to "live as people who are free"?

Practically explained, this freedom is the inability to be shaken, because this world is not our home (vv. 11-12). It is this freedom that makes our submission uniquely Christian. We may sweetly submit to even the worst of rulers, because we know who our real Master is and we know that we submit for His sake, to honor Him. And we are not shaken by anything that happens to us in our earthly submission, for we know who our real Master is and we know that we submit for His sake, to honor Him. His sovereignty and salvation anchor us!

See, we used to truly be in bondage. Our bondage under earthly government was just one manifestation of our spiritual and eternal bondage. But Christ changed all that. He set us free! He transferred us to the kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13) and made us citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20). As a result, we are free on earth.

Through the gospel, we've been given a sure foundation, one that is never changed and can never be taken away (cf. Hebrews 10:34). Therefore, no matter what happens in our earthly citizenship, we maintain our submission, joy, and hope. This is how free we are! Our peace and confidence is not shaken by public opinion, cultural conditioning, or party politics. Instead, we are able to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4).

In particular, brothers and sisters, we should be free from two manifestations of bondage.

1. From rebellion

Peter says that we should not use our freedom "as a cover-up for evil." When people under submission feel oppressed, silenced, victimized, they often begin to foment rebellion. Not the Christian. He is free from such bondage. When wronged, he is free enough to be able to do no wrong (cf. Luke 6:27-35). For the Lord's sake, he sweetly submits and is not shaken or shattered by unjust rulers. Rulers are the Lord's responsibility; our responsibility, as we will see, is much closer to home.

2. From fear

As I've mentioned before over the last few months, I think this is the source of bondage that many Christians need to be unshackled from. Since God has sovereignly and purposefully sent us into earthly submission, we are wrong to fear the myriad of issues that we do. Yes, friends, quite possibly you are sinning when, in your civic submission, you disobey Jesus' command to "fear not."

A friend said to me last night, "If those who were fearful this [election] morning are fearless tomorrow [with GOP control], it will reveal where their faith is placed (Hint: not the promises of God)" (Paul Whitt). Our joy and confidence and peace should not be so easily robbed. Fellow Christian citizens, we must beware the bondage of fear! Christ has set us free!

Perhaps Donald Trump will stem the loss of religious freedom. Perhaps he will reestablish the American dream. Maybe he will contribute to human flourishing in our country and we will experience a new era of safety and prosperity. Maybe he will revive a culture of justice and dignity. Or ... maybe not. The truth is that we don't know what God did last night. Maybe it was His mercy. Maybe it was His judgment. We just don't know. We're all tempted to read far too much into it and maybe even read it wrong. But, at least this we know — whatever the outcome, we didn't need to fear!

Especially in American politics, it seems that the church often battles with specific fears.

- the fear of losing power/influence/control¹
- the fear of losing prosperity (i.e., the unbiblical "American Dream")
- the fear of losing safety/security (e.g., terrorism, refugee crisis)
- the fear of other people (whom we often see as the conduit of the previous loses; thus, they are wrongly deemed, "the enemy"—us vs. them)

When it comes to religious freedom, human flourishing, power, control, security, safety, and justice, Jesus never promised those things to His followers or told us to lose our lives in order to secure those blessings. He did, however, adopt us into His family and transfer us into His country where we need never worry about those things! And then for His sake, He sent us into earthly submission knowing exactly what that request would demand of each one of us and giving us a mission that more important than any ruler's agenda. Therefore, we should "live as people who are free" and not fear!

RESPECT PEOPLE (v. 17)

Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood.

1. Be gracious toward outsiders.

Peter writes, "Honor everyone." Listen to people and learn from them. Give people the benefit of the doubt. Weep with those who weep. Try to understand those who are hurting. Comfort those who are distressed. Be the hands and feet of Jesus, and love the unlovely.

A few weeks ago, Joe Carter (TGC) tried to explain the Trump-divide among evangelical voters (thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-evangelicals-are-divided-over-trump). He suggested pro-Trump evangelicals were prioritizing justice and anti-Trump evangelicals were prioritizing witness. I thought his analysis was simplistic, but at some level helpful.

Today, I've been saddened as I've begun to discover the challenges to our witness that the church might face in the weeks and months to come. I have heard of many minorities and refugees who are discouraged and frightened at the result of last night. They are experiencing the fear that the justice crowd would have had if Hillary won—only, many of them don't have the anchoring freedom and hope of the gospel. Additionally, many of them are confused at the evangelical support of someone they view to be the antithesis of the grace of Jesus Christ.

For example, these are a couple of disturbing comments on some Facebook conversations today. And in the spirit of "honoring everyone," don't write-off or condemn these comments. Listen to them; try to understand them.

- "Well it looks like American Christians care more about the Republican Party than they care about racism, sexism, bigotry, and sexual assault."
- "It sure is hard to look my black friends—brothers and sisters that have lost family members—in the eye and tell my girl friends that have been sexually assaulted that theirs is a 'lesser evil.'"
- "I'm absolutely dropping Christianity. Burning my bibles tonight. I was shown they hold ZERO weight for most of the people I know who say they follow it. ... If the Christians I know are going to say, 'This is true,' and then live some other way, I'm out. Look in the mirror and immediately forget what you look like Christians. I don't need [those] constraints if you're not going to follow the book that says why those constraints are good. Enjoy 'ending abortion' (which you won't do) and then deriding and not assisting unwed mothers. I'll be out here not giving a -- anymore."

I don't share this to cast any judgment on how anyone voted. Remember, this isn't a political talk tonight. Instead, as a body of Christ-followers, we need to understand what we're up against in *our* mission to help people find and follow Jesus. Some don't know if they can trust us. Some are afraid that we are against them. Some feel like we are opposed to them. Some have heard us reflect a malicious spirit and a wisdom that is not from above.

Brothers and sisters, this is a good place for us to start in our post-election practice—honor everyone. Don't allow your political position to dictate your personal disposition. In freedom, honor everyone!

2. **Be unified with insiders.**

Peter adds, "Love the brotherhood." Harkening back to our introduction, don't push each other away, but rather draw close. We need our diversity—we have different backgrounds, perspectives, points of view, ideas, concerns, goals, etc. All of that is helpful in rounding us out to be a community that really offers hope and help to the hurting world around us. Yes, we need each other—to lean on, to show us our faults, to expose our idols, to manifest our enslaving fears, to help us show Christ to our friends, to collectively serve our society.

FEAR GOD (v. 17)

Fear God.

The fear of God should manifest itself in at least two ways in our lives.

1. **In worship**

Against the fear that often enslaves, let us depend upon God. He is good and great, and we may rest in His perfect and unthwartable rule in heaven and in earth.

In addition to such dependence, love God for being that way! Worship Him for what He is doing, even though we don't know what that is. Take time to be still and know that He is God, and to grow in your love for what you learn of Him.

2. In mission

God's mission is so much bigger than yours. And so much closer to home! His mission transcends swing states and is greater even than America itself. But His mission is also much more intimate than the presidency. God's mission is to rescue a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, and His mission relates importantly to the people in your own sphere.

In light of yesterday's election, I fear that we sometimes overestimate the culturally-conditioned influence of our vote and underestimate the divinely-commissioned influence of our voice. "My vote, my voice" is an inspiring slogan, but is too short-sighted for a Christian. Our voice does not end with our vote! So, don't let your voice be silent after the casting of your ballot.

America no longer appears to be a Christian nation; instead, for a long time now it has increasingly embraced an insolent moral revolution that has even infected the American church. No, America is not the hero, but it may yet be a harvest field! The problem, then, is not a lack of leadership or a deficiency of votes; the problem has always been that "the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:35-38).

Christian, you and I are the only ones that can solve that problem. So, let's use our voice! Let's be the solution, Christian! Let us deliver unto others that which is "of first importance": "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)! Yesterday, you got to say something to the world about the makeup of your government; but better yet, every day you get to say something to your friends about the power of the gospel! Do you? Dear brother and sister, our mission is nothing less than to share the gospel and to show the gospel!

ENDNOTES

¹ Our nation was initially built upon biblical principles and gospel implications that produced both cultural flourishing and ecclesiastical influence. The life and ministry of the church had a real and regular impact upon individual families and whole communities. The local pastor was held in high esteem, and the teaching of God's Word (or at least the commonly-accepted morality of it) was brought to bear even on secular America (e.g., CBS morals watchdog, William H. Tankersley). This influence was revived and intensified during America's many periods of spiritual awakening.

As a result, I believe the church began to attach to its theology of Christian living, the church, and the gospel ideas that are not biblical. It failed to draw a distinction between the nature of Christianity itself and those things that were a result of God's gracious and powerful usage of Christianity in America. In particular, I think the following privileges became important and protected ideologies of American (cultural) Christianity: the church's influence in political directions and decisions, and its influence over social morality and acceptability. Over time, the simplicity of life in Christ, the wisdom of pleasing Christ, and the mission of proclaiming Christ became secondary to winning the White House, pushing a conservative agenda, protecting religious liberty, and putting revolutionaries in their place. In many sectors, Christianity took on a primarily cultural, political, and institutional dynamic. Changing or preserving culture through personal evangelism and distinct living was replaced with a focus on electing the right candidate, passing the right bills, or stopping the wrong ones.

Over the last few decades, in particular, the influence of and appreciation for Christianity have greatly diminished. Most recently, the moral or sexual revolution in America is threatening to strip any residual power and control from the church. As a result, many Christians are responding to the revolution by pinning their hopes on this election in ways incongruous with previous eras, inconsistent with biblical considerations, and revelatory of their culturally-perceived theology. The church is gripped by the fear of losing control, and so in this presidential election many Christians are not only discarding, but are also often demeaning biblical arguments that have been consistently applied to one's choice of candidate support.

For example, the argument that "character counts" is no longer applicable for one reason or the other, although it was the very argument that stirred the church to loudly support the impeachment of former President Clinton. As another example, many politically minded Christians are now refusing to honor the appeal to individual conscience, thereby hypocritically doing to other Christians what they are condemning in the moral revolution. And then there are the numerous biblical arguments they wield that rest on passages or pericopes ripped out of their context with very little critical thought applied. For many of these individuals, it appears that their idolatry of "winning the White House" and protecting the Supreme Court has caused them to abandon individual evangelism (truth) and sacrifice personal graciousness. In all this, the church is guilty of elevating pragmatism over principle. Appeals to simple theology concerning conscience, the purpose of the church, or the truth of the gospel are ignored because they don't match the culturally-informed theology that the church has embraced over the last several decades.