

1 - "A Political Gospel" // Mark 1:1; Luke 2:1–14 // *Citizens of Another Kingdom #1*¹

Introduction

Open your Bible to the Gospel of Mark... I heard a story about some instructions that supposedly appeared in a **Peace Corps** training manual for volunteers serving in the Amazon rainforest. These were instructions about how to survive an anaconda attack in the jungle-- the anaconda, of course, is the largest snake in the world; it can grow up to 35 feet long and swallow a 350 lb animal whole. Here were the instructions:

1. *Don't run.* (They say the anaconda is fast enough to catch you. I say, let the anaconda prove it! And if I am with somebody else, I don't have to be faster than the anaconda, just faster than that guy.)
2. *Lie flat on the ground and keep arms close to your side and your legs together.*
3. *Tuck your chin in*
4. *The snake, assuming you are dead, will begin to nudge you and climb over your body.*
5. *Do not panic.* (This one is my favorite: Do not panic!!!! If God designed the panic reflect for *anything*, it was this moment)
6. *After the snake has begun to examine you, it will begin to swallow you, feet first. It always swallows feet first. Permit the snake to swallow your feet and ankles. Do not panic.*
7. *The snake will then begin to suck your legs into its body. You must lie perfectly still. This will take a long time.* (I mean, honestly, at

this point I'm wondering if the snake is the one who wrote these instructions...)

8. *When the snake has reached your knees. Slowly, and with as little movement as possible, reach down, take your knife, and very gently insert it into the snake's mouth between its mouth and your leg. Then suddenly rip upward, killing the snake. (And best of all...)*
9. *Be sure you have your knife.*

"Don't panic." That's great advice, but depending on the situation, it's easier said than done.

2024 is an election year. **Don't panic.**

Let's acknowledge: 2020 was not a great year for Christians with respect to our engagement in the political process; churches were really divided, and here we go again. On the one hand, we know we're called to engage in the political process, but on the other hand we do so as citizens of another kingdom. Our vote matters, yes; but our Christian witness matters more.

I'm looking at 2024 like a divine mulligan, a chance to "do over" what we messed up in 2020. So, we're going to take 2 weeks, this week and next, to talk about what faithfulness to Jesus looks like in the political season coming up. I'm doing this week, and Pastor Bryan will teach next week. Our goal is to give clarity about how followers of Jesus should approach the coming season, not to be partisan.

¹ Works consulted: Walter Kim, NAE Conference talk; Tim Keller, *King's Cross*; Daniel Darling, "[Bringing Hope to an Election Year](#)," interview with the ERLC, April 2024; Andrew T. Walker, "[The Nations Belong to God: A](#)

[Christian Guide for Political Engagement](#)," ERLC; *Luke for Everyone*, Tom Wright; *Luke 1–12 for You*, Mike McKinley; William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT.

You say, “But Pastor, it’s May. The election is not until... November.” Yes, I realize that. But I wanted to do this now for a couple of reasons: First, I want you to be prepared before you get sucked into the whirlwind. Think of this like premarital counseling: the idea is that you want to know how to handle the storm before it comes, because it’s really hard to learn these principles in the middle of a storm. Or like buying the knife before you head out into the Amazon. It’s easier to pick out a good knife now than to be looking for one when you’re knees deep into the mouth of an anaconda.

The second reason I want to do this now is that by the time we get to November, this subject will probably be dominating the airwaves, and some of you will feel like jumping out of a window by that point, and I don’t want to add to that by having that be all we think about when we come in here, too. So we’re going to talk about it now--and when people ask me, “Pastor, when are you going to say something?” I’m going to point you back to this. Of course, during that season, we’re going to be equipping you with prayer resources, and we’ll also be putting out a series of articles, podcasts and interviews that address more specific issues as we get closer.

OK, are you ready? Don’t panic. Lie perfectly still and keep your arms by your side... Just kidding. But seriously. Find your inner happy place. SERENITY NOW!

I’m going to read two short passages that you probably never realized were intensely political.

Mark 1:1: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...”

And **Luke 2, the beginning of Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus.**

Luke says: “And in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered... (And if you jump down to vs 9, “And an angel appeared to shepherds out in the field and said... ‘Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord... ‘ **14** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’” **(Luke 2:1–14)** (You’re like, “You really have lost your mind: election’s not til November and now you’re preaching on Christmas verses, too?)

We read these verses and think Mark and Luke are merely introducing their Gospels, but they are actually picking a political fight.

To understand that, though, I need to give a quick history lesson:

As Luke indicates, the most significant political ruler in the world at the time of Jesus’ birth was **Caesar Augustus (PIC)**. Augustus had ruled the Roman Empire since 27 B.C., an Empire that stretched from Britain to India and constituted the known world at the time.

Augustus had not always been called Augustus. His original name, his birth name, was **Gaius Julius Octavian**. Octavian was the adopted son of Julius Caesar.² Julius Caesar, as you may remember, had been murdered on the Ides of March in 44 B.C., and after his death there

² Augustus was the grand nephew of Julius.

had been a 17-year-long civil war in which different family members and Roman generals vied for power. In 27 B.C. Octavian emerged as the victor (which basically meant he murdered all his competitors before they could murder him; basically, he won the first Hunger Games.)

Well, just prior to his victory in 27 B.C. a strange new star had been seen in the heavens, which Octavian said was his murdered ancestor, Julius Caesar, ascending into heaven to take his seat at the right hand of Zeus, the supreme Roman God. Well, since Octavian was Julius' son, that made Octavian "the son of god," so he changed his name to Augustus, which meant "exalted" and declared himself to be "the son of god."³

- **Roman coins (PIC)** at the time labeled Caesar as the "son of God."
- His propaganda agents began to call him (and I'm not making this up; you can find this in any encyclopedia) "God from God;" "Lord, Savior and Redeemer;" and "the savior of mankind." His heralds declared, "*Hail, Caesar! There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved.*"
- In fact, this is fascinating: Archaeologists have uncovered an **inscription on a calendar (PIC)** from the Roman city of Priene, dated 9 B.C. It's again, a piece of Augustus' propaganda: *The providence which has ordered our lives, showing concern and zeal, has ordained the most perfect consummation for human life by giving us Augustus, filling him with virtue and making him...a*

³ *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 107. For information on the comet, see Augustus' own *Memoirs*, and www.uic.edu/las/clas/comet/ABSTW51.DOC: "The comet of 44 possesses great historical significance because it came to be interpreted as a sign of Caesar's apotheosis, and it has been celebrated and written about over the course of many centuries. The Chinese too observed a comet in 44 B.C., and it was quite probably identical with the one seen from Rome. We are fortunate to have this independent evidence of a comet sighting in 44, untainted by any suspicion that it could have been invented merely to lend greater historical significance to Caesar's murder on the Ides (15th) of March. In Italy, the comet caught the fancy, it seems, of contemporary astrologers and prophets, and centuries later it intrigued the scientific minds of Sir Isaac Newton and Sir Edmund Halley." See also <http://www.biblicalchronology.com/evidence.htm>.

*savior who will make wars cease and bring peace to all men... The birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the gospel for the world that came by him.*⁴ (The account of Augustus' life and work was literally called "a Gospel.")

- **He even claimed that this was all happening according to prophecy. He appealed to a prophecy quoted by Virgil in his *Aeneid*** that supposedly dated back to the founding of Rome. That prophecy had supposedly foretold a future offspring who would be a "son of the deified," and who would "bring in the kingdom of heaven" and "usher in a golden age of mankind." *Aeneid*, Bk 6.⁵ (I say "supposedly" because there is no historical evidence this prophecy actually existed; it was some kind of legend Virgil just wrote down)
- Caesar's symbol was the Imperial Eagle, soaring high above the chaos of earth and bringing a divine new Kingdom to earth.
- There were two humongous Temples (**pic of statue of Augustus**) that housed gods from across the Greco-Roman world--temples where they kept statues of all the gods, think of like a petting zoo of gods--one was the Pantheon in Rome and the other was the Parthenon in Athens, and in front of both of them Augustus put an image of himself w/ the inscription, "*Caesar, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.*"⁶
- **To be a good Roman citizen**, your pledge of allegiance included the words "Caesar is Lord."

⁴ [PIC](#)

⁵ "Here is Caesar, and all the offspring of [Julius] destined to live under the pole of heaven. This is the man, this is him, whom you so often hear, promised you, ... son of the Deified, who will make a Golden Age again in the fields where Saturn once reigned." *Aeneid, book 6, lines 790–794.*

⁶ https://www.theposthole.org/sites/theposthole.org/files/downloads/posthole_40_300.pdf

Mark 1:1: *"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."* **Luke 2:1** *"And (in the days of Caesar Augustus) an angel appeared to shepherds out in the field and said... 'Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord...' 14 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'"*

These Bible writers knew exactly what they were doing when they chose this language. They were saying, There is a King of kings and Lord of lords, a savior of mankind, a Son of God, and his name is not Caesar Augustus, it's Jesus.) That's why the phrase "Jesus is Lord" was so offensive to Romans. They didn't consider it a private religious confession— "Jesus is MY personal Lord and I follow his religious ways." No, they were making a political claim: they were saying that Caesar did not deserve absolute allegiance because he was unable to do what we promised. Caesar couldn't save, only Jesus can save. Salvation is found in no other name beside Jesus, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

So, that's point #1:

I. We preach an alternative gospel

Caesar, as have many would-be saviors throughout history, promised salvation--Peace. A kingdom. Utopia. Meaning. Happiness.

The Apostles said, "What Caesar promises, only Jesus delivers on." Caesar Augustus entitled his reign "the Pax Romana" (the "peace of Rome"), in which he brought a new era of civilization to the world. But for a lot of people his reign was anything but peaceful.

Those immense building projects that we all love to visit today were accomplished through slavery and oppression. It was estimated that close to 80–90% of a person's income in those days was collected in Roman tax. Toward the end of Augustus' reign the Jewish council sent a delegation appealing to Caesar, saying that his taxes had reduced Israel to a land of helpless beggars.

There was peace as long as you obeyed Caesar's will, and if you stepped out of line, his response was brutal. When a group of young Jews, for example, pulled down the eagle that he'd set up over the entrance of the Jewish Temple, because they thought it was blasphemous, he murdered them all. Strung them up on crosses.

The central question of this Bible is "who can really save us?" and "who deserves our absolute allegiance?" Many would-be-political saviors throughout history have made similar promises to Augustus. Vladimir Lenin said that if the workers of Russia would unite, peace and prosperity would come. But in the process, his and his successor's administration slaughtered 20 million people and brought Russia to the eve of economic ruin. One scholar notes that *"One half of all Russian males who died in the twentieth century died of unnatural causes--from war, famine, execution, or imprisonment..."* We sit here and say, "Yeah, that's why we're not communist, capitalism is so much better," and, I agree that free market capitalism is far better than Communism, but has it delivered on its promises to save? How often have we heard about the abuses of unrestrained capitalism? Corruption and greed and manipulation, non-majority groups disadvantaged in the system--and just emptiness.

I've tried to point this out to my kids how many of the commercials we watch on TV promise some form of salvation. I feel like I have them decently trained on this now: we were watching TV the other night, and some commercial advertising Sprite or something came on and there are people laughing and hugging and dads throwing kids in the air, and one of my kids said, 'Dad, do you think if we drank more Sprite our family would get along like that?' and I had a proud moment. They recognize that in a consumer based culture, advertisers preach a "gospel." *"This will complete your life."*

Technology and education promise salvation. In the late 1960's a report was given before Congress that claimed that because of the rate of technological advance, within 30 years the average citizen would only have to work 12 hour weeks and would have so much free time they wouldn't know what to do with it! We're well past that 30 year mark: how many of you have so much free time on your hands you don't know what to do with it? Most of us wouldn't say that these little supercomputers we carry around in our pockets are the salvation we've all been waiting for.

The Apostles said, "Caesar is a counterfeit. We respect him and where he acts justly we praise him, but salvation is found in no one else but Jesus."

Politics today in America, on both sides of the aisle, tend to speak with Messianic tones: *"Believe this. Follow this. Subscribe to this and*

it will lead us to that glorious peace and happiness we've all dreamed."

And I'm not saying there's not better choices. I'm just saying when they speak with Messianic tones, don't you believe it. The Christian confession is that Jesus is Lord, not Caesar or Roosevelt or Reagan. We need a bigger and better Savior. Our King is Jesus, and truly there is salvation found in no one else, and there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved. **We preach an alternative gospel.**

II. We engage in earthly politics, but as citizens of 'another kingdom'

The fact that we preach an alternative gospel *doesn't* mean we disengage from politics here. Good politics, we say, is a way of loving our neighbor, and the Christian worldview has profound political implications. **God has called his people to be salt and light** in all spheres of society, bringing his *shalom, his peace*, into every dimension. Every inch of this world is God's world, and following his principles brings life to it everywhere.

- It can easily be argued that the greatest social benefits the Christian worldview have bestowed on the world are its teaching on respect for individual liberty and freedom of conscience; the dignity and equality of all people; the importance of the rule of law and the need for checks and balances on authority because of the inherently corrupting nature of authority. These things were largely unheard of before Christians and Jews introduced them.⁷

⁷ See also Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*. Holland's book is (probably) the most accessible and influential expression of this argument.

- (I read a fascinating book a few years ago, called *The Poverty of Nations*, co-written by a Christian economist and a Christian theologian, that demonstrated that societies that embrace a biblical view of man and creation end up flourishing, even if they don't acknowledge God as the author of those principles. And those that don't end up in poverty. I'm talking about biblical principles of justice and individual responsibility and the importance of private property ownership and the corrupting power of sin.⁸)
- So, many of the **freedoms and blessings we enjoy today came from Christians** who got involved in politics (they didn't sequester...). And, by contrast, many of our greatest societal evils-- thinks like systematized slavery and institutionalized racism and bigotry came from Christians not applying the Christian worldview in the public square. In the Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King, Jr. complained that America was not living in accordance with its Christian worldview when it came to people of color, and he called us back to it.
- So, we can't pull back from politics and say, "Politics don't matter. I have a higher calling." Your calling is to be salt and light, applying God's wisdom in all areas of creation--and that includes economics, care for the poor, education, and foreign policy.
- In 1 Tim 2 Pauls tells us to ... [Pray] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life ... 1 Timothy 2:1-2 Pray for your leaders, he says, because what they do affects how people live. (BTW, it stands to reason that if Paul commands us to pray for this, then we who have experienced the answer to that prayer, who have the rights Paul is urging Timothy to pray for-

-surely we should continue to pray for and advocate for the preservation of those rights. Read through Acts sometime and you'll see that Paul **used any chance he got before government leaders to advocate for freedom.** We see him do that, for example, in Acts chapters **16, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 26.** *Paul used any chance he had before people in power to appeal for religious liberties.*)

- **Jeremiah 29:7** tells us to "... 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." Seeking the peace and prosperity of our city means working for justice and prosperity and flourishing through good politics.

So, that means we have a responsibility to engage in politics. You should be registered to vote, and if you're not, you're failing in your Christian civic responsibilities. **But, and this is important: BUT--**we do so as citizens of another kingdom.

As important as politics are, we, the church, have an even higher allegiance because we know there's only one true Savior of mankind. One of God's names in the Old Testament was **Jehovah Nissi**, and it means, "The Lord is my banner." Literally, that means, "The Lord is the flag under which we march!"

You've got to choose which flag on the top of your heart:

Republican. Democrat. As a Christian, the flag you fly highest must be the gospel flag. Your highest allegiance must be to King Jesus. Your

⁸ Wayne Grudem and Barry Asmus, *The Poverty of Nations*.

primary identity must not be with the eagle or the elephant or the donkey, it must be the Lamb.

THIS BIBLE (hold up Bible) was offered on social media. It was endorsed even by one of the presidential candidates. It's the 'God Bless the USA' Bible. It's got the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence here in the back, and it's got the American flag imprinted on the cover.

- Now, let me be clear. I'm thankful for America and I want God to bless America. And I love our Constitution and our Bill of Rights; I don't know of any government charter in history that has been its equal; it's not perfect, but founded on many biblical principles.
- And I love our flag--I mean, I have a pair of American flag crocs I wear that my wife hates but I love them. Seriously, I love our flag and I believe it is a symbol of freedom and should be appropriately honored and respected.
- But do not wrap this Bible in the American flag, and do not put flawed documents from a secular government up next to this sacred text.
- There is only one gospel that saves, and it didn't come out of a courthouse in Pennsylvania, it came from an empty tomb in Jerusalem. The Apostles proclaimed, "Your hope doesn't come riding in on a white horse at the front of a Roman regiment, nor does it come today riding on the wings of Air Force 1. Our hope was born into a manger 2000 years ago and proclaimed to poor shepherds in a field. Our true King doesn't sit behind the Resolute desk and he does not stand for re-election every 4 years. He reigns from the right hand of God forever and ever.
- Only one deserves my allegiance

Which leads me to #3... (Bible)

III. We speak the truth that is before, above, and after politics

Because we preach an alternative gospel, we speak the truth that is before, above and after political parties. We speak truths from a higher, and better, and more eternal Kingdom. Truths that transcend politics. Truths that will be true long after politics.

And I know you agree with that. I'm about to test how much you agree with it. Summit, this is where my heart is most burdened, because it's where we failed so badly last time.

I want to give a few pieces of very specific counsel: some will apply more to those of you who lean right, and others will apply more to those who lean left. But honestly, I don't think anything I'm about to say is partisan. I think any Christian of any persuasion whose highest allegiance is King Jesus should agree with these without even blinking.

But let me give an important CAVEAT before I share them: Some of you will try to interpret ONE or other of these as me urging you to vote one way or the other. You'll say, "Oh, in saying that, he means we should definitely NOT vote for this person," or he's saying that "we definitely SHOULD vote for this one" or maybe he's saying that "we should not vote for either candidate." But that is precisely what I'm not doing. In fact, I'm pretty sure some of this counsel will pull you in different directions, or it will at least create tension in your heart.

(Listen--politics is an imperfect process--we try to hold different biblical values in tension and choose the candidate we think will most move the country in the right direction. It's almost always, in a sense, choosing between the lesser of two evils. I'm not saying there's not sometimes a better choice, or that I don't have an opinion, just that it's an imperfect process, and it's my job to give you the biblical values, and your job to put them into your political calculus and make a decision.

I don't connect the dots for you on purpose, and that's because God has called me, as a pastor, to teach the Bible. And that means when I stand in this pulpit, with this book open, where the Bible speaks, I speak. And where the Bible doesn't speak, I don't speak. Where there is a direct line between what the Bible says and some political policy, I will connect the dots. Where there is at best a dotted line (meaning you can't say), "This verse directly **COMMANDS** this particular choice," then I refrain from connecting any dots, even if I have an opinion about which choice is a better application of Christian wisdom. Politics is the application of Christian wisdom to specific situations, and that's an important process, but it's not my calling to connect those dots for you. And so, again, where there is a direct line--racism is wrong; killing the unborn is wrong, working for the prosperity of all is right--I connect the dots. But where there's a dotted political line, I teach you the biblical truth & refrain from telling you how to apply it.

So, again to repeat the caveat...: Don't interpret what I'm about to say as me telling you who to vote for. (You say, "Pastor you're repeating yourself; yes, I'm not new at this, I know what some people will do...") You're going to hear some of this and say, "Oh, he's saying that we

must vote for... or not vote for...) I'm not doing that. I'm giving you the unchanging truth that is before, above, and after earthly politics. These truths are for all Christians everywhere and ones we should easily find agreement on. And, btw, I fully recognize that this entire caveat is the *very thing* that social media vultures will choose to leave out so they can pull what I say out of context. But what can I do?

Can I ask a favor, in this next section, if at some point you feel the desire to clap, can you refrain? Maybe you do a little finger clap. Because I don't want this to turn into, 'Yeah, you tell them other idiots.'

OK, you ready? Don't panic. Lie perfectly still.

To those who tend to lean right:

1. Don't equivocate about character

The Bible says that "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach (a curse) to any people." (**Prov 14:34**) Immorality, or corruption, or pride, or a tendency to denigrate others, or boasting of sexual exploits and assaults, has lasting and devastating effects on a nation, especially when associated with those in the highest office of the land.

And don't say, "Well yes, but this candidate gets things done," or "he's better than the other guy so I'll stay silent about his faults so as not to hurt his chances of winning." That is precisely what I'm talking about in this message. When you think that way, you show that you are more caught up in the politics of Caesar than of heaven.

As followers of Jesus, we have to speak as representatives of a kingdom before, above and after these parties; as citizens of heaven, not earth; as those who testify to the true way, not an earthly one; as children of the Lamb, not the offspring of a donkey or elephant.

Yes, your vote matters, but our witness matters more, and our silence on celebrated wickedness makes it hard for people on the other side to take us seriously about Jesus. Full Stop.

Obviously, this applies to both parties, but I'm saying it to those of you who lean right for a reason.

2. If you don't like the other side's solution on poverty relief or the promotion of equality, put forward your own

Biblically, we are commanded to care for the poor, to look out for the vulnerable, and to assist the underprivileged. More than 2000 verses in the Bible command us to do so, and Jesus says in the final judgment that one of things that will show whether our faith was real was how seriously we took those verses.

So, if you don't like the strategy of the other side in caring for the poor--IOW, if you're the kind of person who says that the Great Society has proven, historically, to be a failure, or that "the greatest argument against progressive politics is the state of progressive

cities," then what is your solution? If you are someone who feels like big government solutions to poverty relief are not effective and are based on un-biblical principles, then what is yours? Talk more about it. I mean, it is undeniable that we, as Christians, are called to care for the poor and vulnerable. How do you propose we do that? **Let our voices, whatever side of the political aisle we're on, be the loudest in support of the poor.** And let us be known, as Christians, as those most committed to the poor. We have ministries, Summit, that seek to address poverty and reduce suffering. How involved are you with them? How much are you giving so we can start more of them?

The same is true with racial issues. If you don't like the other side's solutions to racial inequalities or historic injustices, how are you addressing them? Why was it that majority-culture evangelical Christians, who understood what the Bible says about righteousness and justice and the sanctity of all life, regardless of race, why was it that we weren't first in line in the civil rights movement? What a stain that is on our history. Let it not be true any longer.

That's to those who tend to lean right... (If the whole time, you were like, "Yeah! Get em!" then, this next part is probably for you?) To those of you who tend to lean more left...

3. Call out expressly evil things in your party's platform⁹

⁹ <https://democrats.org/where-we-stand/party-platform/>. Accessed April 29, 2024.

There are a few things in the official Democratic Party's platform that are expressly and, I would add here, devastatingly, unbiblical.

The Democratic Party platform endorses, in no uncertain terms, abortion on demand. It says, and I quote directly from their platform:

"We believe unequivocally, that every woman should be able to access ...safe and legal abortion."

The Democratic Party platform tragically accepts that men and women can change their gender--IOW, that a boy who thinks he is a girl, for example, is, in fact, a girl. It says, for example (and again, I quote), **"We will work to ... guarantee transgender students' access to facilities based on their gender identity."**

These are tragic errors wreaking havoc on society, and you can't be silent on them because you want Democrats to win. If you are supportive of certain Democratic economic or social policies and you align yourself with them but you don't speak up about these, then you become complicit in these things. Listen, as of 3 years ago, there is not a single pro-life Democrat left in Congress. What a tragedy. If you lean left for economic and social reasons (Like some of my British friends whom, I've discovered, are like this--they are as clear and fierce as I am on life and gender issues, but they just see a bigger role for government involvement in the poor--I'm not saying they are right or wrong; we have some great and pretty spicy conversations--I'm just saying that if that's you, you have to speak out on clear issues of righteousness, even if it goes against your party. For, again, just like we noted above, **"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach (a curse) to any people." (Prov 14:34)**

Again, each of these would apply to people on both sides, they just seem particularly relevant for these respective sides right now. #4, also to those who tend to lean left...

4. Be wise to the implications of ideological constructs

A lot has been made over the last few years about social ideas like "Critical Race Theory" and "Intersectionality." And some have pointed out that these theories sometimes raise helpful questions about what's going on in society--IOW, they've highlighted social dynamics we might otherwise have missed. And we're thankful for that. But what's also become apparent is that these ideas have ideological roots--that is, assumptions about humans and what's wrong with us and how to fix it--and many of these assumptions are drastically at odds with what the Bible teaches.

And here's the thing: when you uncritically adopt an idea because you like a couple of the observations it makes, or you like its goals, and you don't take time to evaluate the ideological construct behind these ideas, these ideas can smuggle in a whole bunch of new problems and injustices which can sometimes be as bad, if not worse, than the problems it purported to solve. Critical Theory and Intersectionality have proven to be like that. That doesn't mean that none of the observations it's made are helpful; just think of those helpful observations like the nose of a camel. You like the nose and want it in your tent. But when you let it in it brings with it the whole camel and soon YOU can't stay in your tent anymore.

Listen, ideas have consequences. Years ago I read a book called *When Helping Hurts*, it wasn't about Critical Theory or Intersectionality, but it explained that a lot of times our sincere desire to help others only ends up hurting because our approach is built on faulty assumptions and ideas. It's clear that's happening with Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality.

And, of course, for those of you who lean right, you have your own worldview ideas that smuggle their way into your thinking. I've already pointed out one of them: the idea that this Bible and the American flag are essentially the same, that America's cause is God's cause, or that God's Kingdom is manifested in a nation-state and its founding documents.

OK, these last two are for everybody (so now we can ALL breathe deeply--the anaconda is leaving). These I think we can say apply to all of you, even those of you who feel politically homeless (if Ron Swanson is here, these are for you):

5. Don't equate secondary strategies with biblical imperatives

IOW, don't draw straight lines where there should be dotted lines. Our friend David Platt said: "There are certain issues on which every Christian must agree... even when there is no political method for resolving these issues upon which every Christian must agree."

In other words, be clear in making a distinction between a straight line in the Bible and a dotted line; when a Bible verse clearly

commands endorsing a particular policy or when you simply think it is the best application of Christian wisdom.

For example, I don't know any verse in Scripture that enumerates **the ideal marginal tax rate**. I have opinions about that, and I think that my opinions are based on biblical principles, but I have no direct line. "This verse says this and that mandates this percentage and no more." Or, I don't know of any direct command concerning the exact number of immigrants we should let into our country or the processes for them becoming citizens. I know biblical principles that touch on these issues, but how we apply them is a dotted line at best.

So, **don't draw a direct line where there is only a dotted one, and realize that someone can share your compassion for the poor even when they disagree with your methodology for helping them.**

6. Never morally equivocate or excuse.

I will hear some say, "Oh yeah, well, our guys may get abortion wrong but Republicans get poverty relief wrong," as if those things were equal. *Abortion is the state-sanctioned murder of the unborn*. It is wrong to equivocate, or act like some fault on the other side justifies that one, as if they morally canceled each other out. Abortion is stamping out an innocent, vulnerable life with the state's blessing! Gender confusion wreaks havoc and leads to long-term, nearly irreparable damage in our society. Stop blinding yourselves to that or downplaying it. If you do, it should make you question what flag is waving at the top of your heart.

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On the right I'll hear people say, "Well, yes, this candidate says this or that egregious or dehumanizing thing, but he's not as bad as the alternative." Don't do that. Speak unequivocally about righteousness.

Going down these roads of compromise is precisely what belies our alternative gospel. When we think these ways, we show that we are more caught up in the politics of Caesar than of heaven. We are the subjects of King Jesus, and we must always come down on his side. Of everything.

You say, "**Well, but what am I supposed to do when there are only these two presidential candidates?**" I know. I know: 300 million Americans and this is what we came up with? Again, politics is messy—you inevitably end up having to choose between imperfect options, and sometimes between really bad options. But just be clear, in it all, where your ultimate allegiance lies. And never waver on that, not for one second. And whoever you vote for, do so with an awareness of their faults, and a commitment to speak out about them where you can.

In other words, if you lean left and I go on your FB page or TikTok scroll or Insta reel and all I see you posting is how bad Trump is and nothing about the egregious wickedness of abortion or the troubling embrace of gender confusion by your party, I have no choice but to think you're more emotionally loyal to the Democratic party than you are to Jesus. And when you lean right and I jump on your page and all I see is how bad the Democrats are on things and no lament and grief on the character of the man who currently heads your party, then I have no choice but to assume the same.

Alright. The snake has reached our knees, hasn't it? Time to use the knife. **Friends, these are toxic waters.** These issues cause deep division in the church. And, in part, I understand why they do: Political issues have consequences. But these issues shouldn't have the power to divide us. Why? Because at the top of our heart Temple, our Parthenon, is not a Republican or Democrat or a Caesar but the Great I AM. We are his disciples, and we stand united in our allegiance to him.

Honestly, sometimes I fear that the reason these things still cause such division in us is that we are more **disciplined by cable news and Mark Zuckerberg's algorithms than we are the Scriptures. I get you for an hour or so each week, and they get you for several hours each day. I can't help but wonder: If we were less influenced by our TV's and phones and more **influenced by Titus and Philemon**, we probably wouldn't have the problems we have.**

Listen, your vote is important. But your witness is more important. Our King has an agenda, and it's not to save America, per se, it's to save Americans. And those of us who follow him have this as our primary agenda, too. So, yes, your vote is important; but your witness is more important.

So, let me close with these questions: What is this election season going to reveal about the idols and allegiance of your heart?(THESE ARE FOR YOU... STOP THINKING ABOUT THE OTHER TEAM). (Are you ready to take down the Republican or Democratic flag over the emotional center of your heart and put up Jehovah Nissi instead?)

And when you see that offensive sign in the yard of your neighbor in a few weeks--the one with the ridiculous generalization about you and blanket endorsement of that candidate you despise, what's your first thought? Sadly, some of us care more about how our neighbor votes than where they will spend eternity. *Doesn't that show we have traded Jehovah Nissi for allegiance to a political idol?*

My prayer is that we come to care more about where our neighbor spends eternity than we do about how they vote.

May the flag we wave, Summit Church, be Jehovah Nissi—THE LORD IS OUR BANNER. “The Lord is the flag under which we, the people of TSC, march!” Amen?