

Engage as Citizens

Romans 13:1-7

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Early on the morning of the final presidential debate, I brought the newspaper in for our 96-year-old neighbor like I normally do. Pointing to the headline in the paper, I asked Val if she was going to watch the debate that night. She quickly replied: *“No way. It’s all disgusting.”* Later that night, Beth and I sat down to watch the debate with our 17-year-old daughter. After about 10 minutes, Megan stood up to leave and said, *“This is disgusting.”*

When I shared this story during our staff team time on Tuesday, Pastor Chad perceptively quipped, *“at least we now have something that brings the generations together!”*

That’s a pretty sad commentary, isn’t it? Val has been through at least 18 presidential elections in her lifetime and is now disgusted with the political process and our daughter, who hasn’t voted yet, is already turned off by all the vitriolic verbiage.

The polls back this up as 71% of seniors say they are stressed and half of all adults are experiencing anxiety during this election season. On the other end of the age spectrum, according to one study, 1 in 4 millennials would rather the earth get hit by *“a giant meteor strike”* than have Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton in the White House.

Here are some words that describe what many are feeling – *fear, anger, disgust, distrust, frustration, embarrassment, and hostility*. One blogger who is a believer commented, *“We live in a culture where snipers live behind laptops and smartphones. Fewer people are interested in debate and more are looking for enemies to eviscerate.”* Some have become unhinged and others are on the ledge. Charles Lyons, a pastor in Chicago, writes: *“This election highlights our social decay and cultural rot. This election serves up exactly what we deserve...we’re in the middle of what we helped create.”*

Our country is conflicted by all the campaigning and some Christians are castigating other Christ-followers who might have different political views than their own. I came across this satirical article with this headline: *“Nation’s*

Christians Look Forward to Questioning Each Other's Salvation in Post-Debate Discussions."

"...Multiple sources confirmed Wednesday that Christians across America are looking forward to questioning each other's standing before God as they discuss the night's event and the looming election at large. 'It's a refreshing litmus test we only get every four years,' noted American citizen Christopher Gilmore. Erica Womack, another American, echoed Gilmore's remarks, adding, 'It's a convenient way to tell true from false believers, since no one who disagrees with me politically is a true Christian. They may say they are, but they're not.'"

This is obviously satire, but I wonder how closely this reflects what many of us really believe.

As I prayed about what to preach this weekend, I came up with ten biblical convictions that will help us *engage as citizens*. We'll finish by walking briefly through Romans 13:1-7. But first, here are two preliminary points.

- **I'm a pastor, not a political pundit.** While I do follow politics with great interest, my understanding is pretty basic. But that's OK because my calling is to be a pastor. The word "pastor" means *shepherd* and as such, my two primary responsibilities are to spiritually *lead* and Scripturally *feed* this flock. 1 Peter 5:2: ***"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you..."***
- **I will not lift up one political party or denigrate another.** I recognize that this topic can be emotionally explosive and so I want to make an appeal for us to be open to what the Bible has to say. [Let's not look at the Bible through Republican or Democratic lenses – hold up red and blue plates]. I came across this quote: *"We aren't here to one-up one another, but to help one another up."*

Related to this, I won't share who I'm going to vote for and have never used the pulpit (or table) to proclaim my political views. That's not to say that I don't receive pressure to do so. One person sent me this note a couple weeks ago: *"Pastor, we're holding our breath awaiting your sermon on politics..."* This individual wanted to know which candidate I'm going to promote. I've been helped by this verse from Daniel 2:21: ***"He changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings..."***

In an effort to communicate a more tender tone today, I'm going to sit down.

1. Voting is a stewardship issue. It's our privilege and responsibility to vote (and some of you have already done so). Deuteronomy 1:13 describes the importance of choosing wisely when Moses gave the people this charge: ***“Choose for your tribes wise, understanding, and experienced men, and I will appoint them as your heads.”*** Note the importance of character as a qualification – *wise, understanding and experienced.*

Listen to what Samuel Adams said about voting: *“Let each citizen remember at the moment he is offering his vote that he is not making a present or a compliment to please an individual - or at least that he ought not so to do; but that he is executing one of the most solemn trusts in human society for which he is accountable to God and his country.”*

2. No president or elected official will provide everything we're looking for. As Chuck Colson used to say, *“Salvation will not arrive on Air Force One.”* I've been reflecting on Psalm 146:3-5 this week: ***“Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.”*** No politician, political party, or president will, or can, meet all our needs. Political promises will evaporate and expectations will go unmet because we live in a fallen world. Our help and hope must always be in the Lord our God.

3. God is supremely sovereign. I'd like to give a fail-safe promise and prediction for what we'll wake up to on Wednesday morning. You ready for it? You better lean in so you don't miss it. Here it is: *God will still be on His throne!* In the middle of his lament over the loss of Jerusalem, here's what Jeremiah writes in Lamentations 3:22-23: ***“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”***

The Almighty will accomplish His purposes, no matter who is president. Remember that He used evil rulers like Cyrus and Caesar, even Nebuchadnezzar and Nero, to fulfill His will. He has worked out His purposes under every condition imaginable from Egypt to Babylon to Rome, through world wars and every circumstance. We might feel things have been taken out of our hands, but *they have not been taken out of God's hands.* Proverbs 21:1: ***“The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”***

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, said this in a recent podcast: *“What I see going on right now in American Christianity is a kind of panic. A panic that is giving itself over to fear that is rooted in a lack of confidence that I think is contrary to the biblical vision of God’s sovereignty and the power of the gospel.”*

Write this down – *Jesus is not running for President but He is running the universe.* Psalm 22:28: ***“For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.”***

4. Christians should be the best citizens. It’s time for us to be nice to each other and kind toward those who have a different political perspective. Check out what one leader had to say about elections.

- To vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy.
- To speak no evil of the person they voted against.
- To care that their spirits were not sharpened against those who voted on the other side.

John Wesley gave this advice on October 6, 1774.

Ephesians 4:32 says, ***“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted...”*** Galatians 6:10: ***“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*** And Romans 12:21 says, ***“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”***

Many years ago my sister Beth was training her Golden Retriever to not bite. Whenever he would show his teeth, she would point at him and say this command in a very low voice: *“Be Niiiiice!”* We use this phrase in our family to this day when one of us gets a bit rambunctious – I’m usually the one needing the reminder. Let’s keep this in mind when it comes to politics - *“Be Niiiiice!”*

During my very first team time with the staff in 2013, I used a rope and tied our wrists together around the table. I made the point that while we will not agree on everything, we are united in Christ. I then read Ephesians 4:2-3: ***“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.”*** I thought about asking for a Republican and a Democrat to come up here to demonstrate this illustration but was worried that I might be the one who would get tied up!

How many of you have read *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis? The book is made up of imaginary letters that an older demon named Screwtape writes to his young understudy, Wormwood as a way to train him to knock Christians off track.

Someone posted a paragraph that does not actually come from the book, but is written as if it did.

My Dear Wormwood, be sure that the patient [the Christian] remains completely fixated on politics. Arguments, political gossip, and obsessing on the faults of people they have never met serves as an excellent distraction from advancing in personal virtue, character, and the things the patient [the Christian] can control. Make sure to keep the patient in a constant state of angst, frustration, and general disdain towards the rest of the human race in order to avoid any kind of charity or inner peace from further developing. Ensure the patient continues to believe the problem is 'out there' in the 'broken system' rather than recognizing there is a problem within himself. Keep up the good work, Uncle Screwtape.

5. Our commitment is to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. While we must care about our country and be involved in elections, let's never forget the three cornerstone commands given by Jesus Christ.

- **Love God with everything we have.** Mark 12:30: ***“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”***
- **Love others as we love ourselves.** Mark 12:31: ***“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*** I should point out that these first two are really *one* command – if we say we love God then we *will* love others.
- **Make disciples of all nations.** We show that we love God and love others by going with the gospel to those who are lost. Matthew 28:19-20: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

Personal conversion through Christ, not political conviction, leads to lasting change. The church's primary task is evangelism and discipleship. While we're prone to divide people according to political affiliation, the Bible classifies people according to whether they are believers or unbelievers, as saved or lost. Our task is to win people to Jesus, not to prove that our political views are right.

We often get so worked up that we forget our role is to be winsome witnesses. Evangelism is God's primary way to deal with the world's problems. Here's a thought. What do you think goes through a non-Christian's mind when he or she

hears us verbally assassinating a politician that he or she might support? What kind of opportunity will we have to evangelize after this? Some of us would benefit greatly by watching news channels less and reading Scripture more. I'm greatly challenged by Colossians 4:5-6: ***“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”***

I love the title of one of Irwin Lutzer's books: *“Why the Cross Can Do What Politics Can't.”* He argues that the problems of America are too far-gone to be remedied by a change of administrations in Washington. God's power is more clearly seen in the message of the cross than in any political or social plan that we might devise. Here's something he wrote just last month: *“Regardless of who is elected, our next president will inherit a deeply divided and angry country. And in the midst of such hostility, the church stands and says to a broken world, ‘Let us tell you about a Savior who can reconcile us to God and to each other.’ Those who need Christ hail from all over the political spectrum and they are lost forever if they don't put their faith in Christ.”*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is our shining moment! The church has always done better when in the minority. I'm not sure we ever were the *moral majority*, but we're certainly not anymore. Instead of being angry about it, let's live as missionaries in the midst of a messed up world. Our primary posture is not political but rather missional. Let's love God, love others and lead the lost to the Savior.

6. Keep politics in perspective. When we see governing authorities doing things that we don't understand, or people getting elected that we don't agree with, remember this promised prophecy from Isaiah 9:6-7: ***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end...”***

Wouldn't it be great if more of us could quote the platform of the King of Kings and less of what we hear a political pundit say? Here's a fundamental proposition: *Jesus Christ must be Lord of our political views and the attitudes in which we share them with others.* To tie into the fifth “sola” we learned last weekend, let's be Christians citizens to the glory of God! Incidentally, as we get closer to the return of Christ, things will get worse and the chasm between believers and unbelievers will become more pronounced. It's time for us to get totally serious about our faith because it will become increasingly difficult to live as Christ-

followers in the days to come.

Our hope is not in an elected president, congress or the Supreme Court but in the Coming King! When Jesus returns He'll set up a one-party system with Him as Lord of all. Revelation 1:5: ***“Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.”***

7. We need revival in the church and an awakening in our land. We began our *Engage* series with a message from 2 Chronicles 7:14: ***“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”*** Psalm 85:6 says, ***“Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?”***

In 1863, in the middle of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln called our country to a national day of *prayer, fasting, and humility*. He stated that because America had become *“intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God who made us. It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves...to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”* He urged prayers for *“the pardon of our national sins and the restoration of our now divided and suffering country to its former happy condition of unity and peace.”*

Since we are a country at war with God and with each other, let's join with thousands of other Christians by praying and fasting on Monday, the day before the election. Do this wherever you are. We won't meet together here but instead pray in the course of our regular routines that day. Will you join me? Romans 12:12 says, ***“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”***

8. Recognize there are two kingdoms in conflict. I've been helped on this point by an excellent book by Chip Ingram called, *Culture Shock*. When Jesus was arrested and brought before Pilate, Jesus spoke of another kingdom in John 18:36: ***“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”***

Jesus then describes His kingdom as a kingdom of truth and that these two kingdoms are in conflict. Pilate gets flustered and frustrated by Jesus' vague and veiled responses and so he challenges Christ in John 19:10: ***“Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?”*** I love how Jesus

answers in verse 11: ***“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.”***

Jesus is continuing to build His spiritual kingdom and this kingdom is in conflict with earthly kingdoms.

9. Christians have a dual citizenship. As Americans, we do have rights and privileges afforded us, and we should take advantage of them by voting and being involved in the democratic process. But as born-again Christ followers, we are first and foremost citizens of heaven as Philippians 3:20 says: ***“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”***

No politician, political party, or president will provide salvation and satisfaction for us. Why? Because 1 Peter 2:11 says we are aliens, pilgrims and sojourners. Ed Stetzer urges us to think of ourselves less as owners and more as aliens. We need to build a theology of exile and ask ourselves, *“What does it look like to thrive in Babylon?”* Check out these words written to believers who lived in Babylon as found in Jeremiah 29:7: ***“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”***

Jesus explains this dual citizenship in Mark 12:13-17. Here’s the background. Two religious groups felt very threatened by Jesus so they got together to take Him out. Interestingly, one group represented the right-wingers (Pharisees) and the other the left-wingers (Herodians). They came up with a trap, hoping to get rid of Jesus once and for all so they asked Him a tricky question: ***“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?”***

His answer stunned his opponents and gives us some insight into how we’re to live in two kingdoms that are in conflict. Listen to verses 15-17: ***“Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.’ And they brought one. And he said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ They said to him, ‘Caesar’s.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ And they marveled at him.”*** Caesar’s image is on the coin so give back to him what he asks for. But don’t forget this truth – you are stamped with the image of God so give your very life to Him. We give our taxes to the government and we give our time, talents and treasures to God.

10. God has established three primary realms in which He works.

- **God works out His plan through the family.** We see this in Genesis 2:18-25. The family is foundational because the state and the church cannot exist without it. Children and teenagers, your parents are God’s delegated authority in your home, and it is your duty to submit to them.
- **God works out His plan through the church.** We see this in Acts 2-4. I like how one pastor puts it: *“There’s nothing like the local church when the local church is working right.”* I love what happened Wednesday night while the Cubs were playing – Chasity Holmquist, one of our Awana leaders, had the joy of leading a young girl to faith in Christ. Witnessing about the Savior is way more important than the World Series!

Speaking of the World Series, did you hear that the Cubs won? Ben Zobrist, a committed Christ-follower, was named the MVP. He’s an alum of Awana and a graduate of Olivet. I posted a fascinating article on Facebook about his Christian testimony. My favorite part included these words from Ben’s dad: *“We felt like Ben’s spiritual life was more important than his sports life... We wanted him to understand the importance of the local church. We didn’t let him play on teams that played on Sundays... Nothing is more important than the Lord. I don’t think children make that connection if the parents don’t have that commitment.”*

Parents, will you make that same commitment to gather with God’s people every weekend?

- **God works out His plan through government.** While we know what God says about the family and the church, in general, we know less about what God thinks about government. While many would say that God and government don’t mix very well, actually government can only be understood to the degree to which we understand God.

Let’s turn to Romans 13:1-7. I’m going to simply read it and then draw five principles from it.

“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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ 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, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."

- We're to submit to governing authorities *because all* authority is established by God
- Those in government are God's servants *and* ministers
- Government is to preserve what is right *and* punish wrongdoers
- We're to keep our consciences clear *by* paying our taxes
- Christians will be the best citizens *when we show* respect and honor

Since God establishes all authority, let's ponder a few questions. This isn't going to be easy, but it's necessary.

1. How do you live this out in your family relationships? Are you chafing under anyone's authority right now?
2. How about in the workplace? Are you honoring and respecting your boss?
3. For those of you who are students, are you honoring your teachers and administrators?
4. Let's think through how we can give honor and respect to those who serve in government. What about resisting name-calling? What about praying for those in positions of authority?

I'd like us to show respect and honor to all those who gain their living in some way through our tax dollars. Would you please stand if you work for a city, your county, your state or our federal government? I know that we have police officers [What a tragedy that two police officers were ambushed and assassinated in Des Moines this week], fire fighters, first responders, state police troopers, sheriff's deputies, correctional officers, parole officers, public school administrators, staff and teachers, along with those who work for the Housing Authority and other government entities. Would you stand? If you work for the Arsenal and if you currently serve in the military, would you stand? If you served our country in the past, would you stand? Have I missed anyone? If so, can you shout out what you do so we can honor you?

Here's a summary of what we've learned today...

1. Voting is a stewardship issue
2. No president or elected official will provide everything we're looking for
3. God is supremely sovereign
4. Christians should be the best citizens
5. Our commitment is to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission
6. Keep politics in perspective
7. We need revival in the church and an awakening in our land
8. Recognize that there are two kingdoms in conflict
9. Christians have a dual citizenship
10. God has established three primary realms in which He works – family, church and government

In his *Epistle to Diognetus*, an anonymous second-century Christian wrote the following beautiful description of believers who genuinely obeyed the commands of Romans 13:1-7: “...*they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others and yet suffer all things as if foreigners...They marry, as do all others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their babies. They share their table with all, but not their bed with all...*

“They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their exemplary lives. They love all men and yet are persecuted by all...they are dishonored and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of and yet are justified; they are reviled and bless; they are insulted and repay the insult with honor; they do good yet are punished as evildoers.

“When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed...and are persecuted... yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred. To sum it all up in one word—what the soul is to the body, so are Christians in the world.” (Underlining mine. As found in “The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 9-16,” page 240).

I watched a video recently by Tony Evans and appreciated his perspective on our topic today. Let's watch it now.

Video: “Humpty Dumpty”

Closing Song: “Heal our Land”

Membership Saturday Night

- Brad and Courtney Reistroffer
- Nick and Teresa Castillo