

The Church and Politics Part 2 – Voting for Shalom

Ephesians 2:19, Mark 1:14-15, Luke 9:1-2

1. Love All.

- *John 13:34-35; Matthew 5:46*

2. Pray Always.

- *1 Thessalonians 5:13-18*

3. Seek Peace.

- *Romans 12:18; Matthew 5:9-10*

love.learn.live.

westvalleychurch.com



West Valley Church
10/27/24
Michael O'Neill

The Church and Politics

Part Two:

Voting for Shalom

Our Father, who is in Heaven, Holy is your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom, yours is the Kingdom, yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

That prayer is the prayer that Jesus told us to pray – it is a prayer for the Kingdom of God to come here on earth. God's Kingdom is a kingdom that is entirely different than any other kingdom of this world that has ever been or ever will be. If we are going to find our way in this election season, we are going to need to be sure that each of us and our church, is living in the Kingdom of God.

We are in the second part of our series on the Church and Politics. The reason we are in this series is because these are very, very difficult days in this country we live in. Outside of the civil war, I'm not sure if our country has ever been more divided. The hatred and unreasonableness and incivility at this point is so evil, one has to wonder if it's coming straight through the gates of hell. Folks, this isn't just a civil battle; it is a spiritual one. I'm not saying that the political party you oppose is evil; I'm saying some of the climate in our country right now is evil. I have real concerns about what is going to happen in our cities when we wake up on November 6th. I'm already praying that there won't be riots and looting and shootings. Satan delights in this division and hatred. We cannot let those spirits get even a foothold in the door of this church or our lives. While our enemy sows hatred and strife, the Kingdom of God is one of peace. That is what we pray for, this is what Jesus specifically told us to pray for, and that is what our lives and church shall demonstrate to the world.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:19 that:

"Now you are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family." (Ephesians 2:19, nlt)

Praise God! When you come to Christ, you are no longer a stranger or foreigner. You are a citizen of the Kingdom of God. Once a citizen of a different kingdom, your ruler was your vices, addictions, and fears. Your ruler was the prince of this world – the author of evil. That is what you left behind when you were baptized and chose to submit yourself to Jesus as

your new King.¹ That's why baptism is so important – it represents your association with Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and our new life in the Kingdom of God. By the way, if you have not yet been baptized, please contact our office and let us know; we will be having a baptism service at the end of November. Folks, we are people of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God no less than 127 times; the only word he used more than that was . . . “Abba” (Father). So the Kingdom come is very important to Jesus, and he wants to make sure we pray for this and live in it and live it out.

Jesus announced the beginning of his ministry with the word “kingdom.” First he was inaugurated at his baptism with the Holy Spirit descending on him. Then he was led into a time of severe testing by the Devil in the wilderness. Then the Bible says Jesus began his ministry this way:

Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, saying, “Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!” (Mark 1:14-15, ceb)

The term “kingdom” is used in the Old Testament indirectly whenever it declares and describes that God rules all the nations of the earth, and whenever God describes how he wants his people, the Jews, to live and treat each other and others. The prophets described the Kingdom of God in all their references to God's plan that he would rule over and provide for the Jews and for all people. The actual term is used by the young prophet Daniel as a description of God's kingdom – a kingdom that would be greater than all other earthly kingdoms and will outlast them all (Daniel 2:44). Daniel would go on to describe Jesus as the king of that kingdom (Daniel 7:14).

As Jesus' ministry began, the term “Kingdom of God” is used to describe the embodiment of his teaching; everything that Jesus taught was to describe what living in the Kingdom of God is like for us in the way we think, the choices we make, and the way we act and treat others. The Kingdom of God is the central feature of Jesus' proclamation. In fact, it was the whole point of the disciples' message, too. Luke describes how Jesus sent the twelve disciples out (later to be apostles, right?) – when he sent them out to preach, they were specifically told to proclaim the arrival and the reality of the Kingdom of God:

“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” (Luke 9:1-2, niv)

So when we pray the way Jesus told us to; when we ask for God's Kingdom to come, what exactly is it we're asking for?

I'd like to share a video with you that explains what the Kingdom of God means in the Bible. Watch this, please.

God's shalom – God's Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven – doesn't mean we withdraw from society and wait for it to arrive. Nor does it mean we enter the political arena hungry

¹ Rev. Eduardo Davila, Sermon: “The Church as a New Humanity,” SoundCloud.com (2-10-20)

for our side to have the power and hating the other side. But we *can* engage, and I would say we *should* engage in politics.

You might wonder if we should even discuss politics; if that's even in the Bible. Let me quote one author in answer to that: "The Bible is intensely political. Every prophet is risking their skin by talking truth to power. Every king weighs obedience to God against other concerns. Every temple, shrine and altar has political ramifications. The same with every war, skirmish and battle. Even the Sermon on the Mount is political. Love your enemies? Do good to those who hate you? Who do you think Jesus is talking about? Religion and politics have always been deeply intertwined. Jesus' own life is an example of that. This co-mingling didn't end with the biblical era. The church, at its best, and its worst, has always been political. We're at our worst when we imagine Christ is aligned with one political party or another. Or when we cut deals. Or when we trade faith for power. We're at our best, however, when like MLK, we strive for the soul of the whole nation."² Given our conversation last week about our allegiance to Christ first above all, let's seek Christ's best for our lives, our church, our community, our nation, and our world above any partisan politics. Because, if we are honest, we will find that at times Jesus acts like a conservative, and other times he acts like a liberal. You might want to think that Jesus was apolitical, or didn't choose any side, but usually people don't get crucified for *not* taking a side. Jesus came to disrupt those in power and to emphasize God's Kingdom and his love for everyone. By the time he was through, he had offended just about everyone. Those in power were challenged to give up their power for God. Those who were oppressed and had no power were challenged to quit seeking to take over power. Those who were rich were called to give up their wealth. Those who were poor were called to stop trying to get rich and instead be rich in God's Kingdom.

First and foremost, we are on Jesus' side. Remember what we committed to last week? So what does that mean? Sometimes it will mean you're taking a stand one way, on one side, and sometimes on the other, and sometimes it will mean taking a stand in a middle way between the two. But it means we will always be on God's side, which means we will always be *for* people who he loves so much (because he loves all people), and we will take responsibility *only* for our own attitudes and actions.

So there are a couple of things we know for sure (there are many, but I'm going to just point out the biggest ones): one is, if we are going to be Kingdom of God people, we are going to...

Love All

Jesus was very clear about this as he's quoted in John 13:34-35...

"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." (John 13:34-35, nlt)

If you are conservative, make it your number one priority to love a liberal! If you are a liberal, love a conservative! Love everyone!

² <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/7955/should-churches-discuss-politics>

Jesus said, "If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much." (Matthew 5:46, nlt)

I can't list all the ways that this will look for you, but can I give you one specific way you can do this? I've seen some things that people have posted on socials that make my heart really hurt – Christian friends of mine and even folks in our church. Before you post something, or share something that someone else posted, ask yourself: would I want someone saying this about my wife or my daughter? Then why post it about Kamala? Would I want someone saying this about my father or son? Then why post it about Donald? You can disagree with their policies and positions, but you can't love them and speak evil against them at the same time.

Loving others is not easy, but you must do it for the Kingdom of God. If you are like me, it will certainly require you to...

Pray Always.

I don't know of any way to change my own attitude and my own ability to love others, then to pray. I ask God to change my heart, and I pray for the person I need to love. And for sure I pray for God to heal the divisions that are in our society today. That's why the Bible tells us, in the middle of instructions about how we ought to treat others, that we should pray to...

"Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other.

Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.

See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people.

Always be joyful. *Never stop praying (say it with me: Never stop praying)* Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:13-18, nlt, *italics added*)

Finally, and this is most urgent to today given our divided country...

Seek Peace.

Our Kingdom priority is not to prove we are right and the other person is wrong. Our Kingdom priority is to seek peace first. The Bible doesn't give us much wiggle room about this:

"Do all that you can to live in peace with *(every republican...every democrat...)* everyone." (Romans 12:18, nlt)

It doesn't say live in peace with those who share your own political views. It means to rise above politicism and be Holy Spirit-filled people who love, pray, and seek peace. We do not seek power. We do not seek power. We do not seek power. We don't need to; we belong

to the Kingdom of God! We love, pray, and seek peace with everyone. Jesus was very clear in his teachings from the Sermon on the Mount:

“God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.” (Matthew 5:9-10, nlt)

Seek peace; be a peacemaker. Pray and work for shalom – for God’s wholeness, for God’s peace. God will bless you for this. Will you be persecuted for it? Perhaps. But if you are, God will bless you for that, too. God’s blessing does not mean it will be easy, or that it won’t be hard. Blessing doesn’t mean the absence of hardship or trial or persecution. It doesn’t mean that you won’t face conflict. In fact, the only way you can obey Jesus’ command to be a peacemaker is when you are faced with conflict! You can’t be a peacemaker unless you are confronted with an opposing view! Did you ever think about that? We seek God’s blessing because we think it means he will take away conflict or trouble. But he says that when you get blessed is when you choose to seek peace with the other person while you are IN conflict. The blessing is peace IN to conflict, the blessing isn’t to never have conflict in this life. The blessing comes when you choose to love, pray, and work for peace.

Again, we can only be responsible for our own actions and attitudes. Where Christians get into trouble is when we think other people’s actions are our responsibility. It doesn’t mean we don’t warn or correct or encourage others, but it means we take responsibility for ourselves ONLY. We love, pray, and seek Kingdom peace. Oswald Chambers, a great Christian preacher, teacher, and writer, said this: “Never look for right in the other man, but never cease to be right yourself. We are always looking for justice; the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is – Never look for justice, but never cease to give it.”³

Take responsibility for yourself. Don’t expect someone else to act appropriately or think appropriately; YOU do so. And you might be surprised how it impacts the person who sees things differently than you. Christ is Lord of all. Submit to him as Lord – be on his side, live as a citizen of the Kingdom of God and love others, pray always, and seek peace.

Prayer

A word about voting:

Christian, you have a right to vote. You have a role in this election at every level so vote. You have a responsibility to vote. This is one way, in our country, that we can have a kingdom of God influence. Submit to Jesus. Pray about the issues, and then go vote. If you haven’t registered yet, you can do it by picking up a form in the foyer. It’s not too late to register to vote. But your vote is not about seeking power for your side; it’s about seeking shalom – God’s peace.

There are some in our congregation who cannot vote. They aren’t citizens yet. They are immigrants. Some are recovering felons. Your vote is also a voice for those who cannot vote who are in your church family.

³ Oswald Chambers, “My Utmost for His Highest”

Listen: a vote is not a play for power. A vote is a prayer for peace. (repeat)

Go in Shalom...

Benediction:

2 Corinthians 13:11 –

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.