

Guiding Principles for Political Involvement

Series: Engaging Politics...Together.

July 26, 2020 – Brad Bailey

Intro

Well.... good morning to all those gathering online this morning... who may be connecting on demand.

I imagine that we all feel some effects of this season of pandemic unsettledness becoming more extended. We are living in a time of change that none of us could have initially imagined. As I shared last week... I have been seeking how God may be speaking to us about how best to live well when we are in the middle of change...and then how to move forward into what is ahead. And that will be our focus starting in a couple weeks.

But today we are continuing our short three weeks on Engaging Politics ...TOGETHER. Our pastoral leadership felt that it was timely to engage this topic now. As one of our youngest adults expressed to me... it's hard to separate the pandemic from politics because the pandemic has become such a political issue... and as we move towards a national election...the political drama is now the front page and front stage of all news and media.

So last week we began with the question: Where is our central hope and allegiance?

We looked at how Jesus entered the human drama in the midst of very polarized and politically division times. And he invested the message and ministry of the redemption of creation into twelve lives... which included some who would have loathed the political position of the other. And what made such a team possible ...was his declaration that God's kingdom was at hand. Initially they could only imagine that God was providing the long awaited king who would restore their earthly nation of Israel. But Jesus explains that his kingdom is "not of the world"... the kingdom of God is God's right to reclaim and rule over everything.

So they begin a process in which their primary hopes and allegiance became defined by a new kingdom.

And only when WE transition our primary hopes and allegiance to God's kingdom will we engage our political world well.

Only as those who give their primary hope and allegiance to the kingdom of God... can we keep our expectations and disappointments in perspective...because we understand that any kingdom or nation in this world...is still of this world.

Only as those who give their primary hope and allegiance to the kingdom of God, can all other earthly identities that will seek to define and divide us... become secondary.

Only as those who give their primary hope and allegiance to the kingdom of God, can we get beyond judging who is good and bad...and offer the grace for sinners to be united with God.

Only as those who give their primary hope and allegiance to the kingdom of God, can we be anchored in the living hope of what is to come.

Only as those who give their primary hope and allegiance to the kingdom of God... can we be the priests and prophets of another kingdom.

And so we do well to begin with the question: Where is our central hope and allegiance?

But this may lead us to wonder... Does this imply that we should not care about the kingdoms of this world? What about our citizenship in earthly realms?

As we heard last week...when the religious leaders tried to trap Jesus with a question about whether the people should pay taxes to Caesar...the Roman emperor...

"Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." - Mark 12:17

Jesus was saying: If the coin is something Caesar made and it bears his image... it belongs to him...but you yourself are made by God and bear His image...so you are not to give yourself to anyone but God. With these words Jesus speaks a word of warning. To those who may become consumed and controlled by political hopes... you may be giving more to the Caesars and Rome's of this world than you should. You belong to God. But it is also important to recognize that with these words... Jesus does not deny that we have a responsibility to what is involved in the governing of earth.

And the Apostle Paul affirms that there is a God-given significance to earthly governing and our earthly citizenship. In the book of Acts, we see the Apostle Paul not only acknowledging the concept of his Roman citizenship but also actively appealing to it. [1]

And he speaks of it's God-given role as a potential good. In writing to those in Rome he says that

(The governing authority) is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Romans 13:4

In a fallen world... humankind can be served by that which can constrain evil and serve the common good. In the very first book of the Bible...the Book of Genesis...we told of creation...then human life seeking to rule themselves...and then when living estranged from God...the very first story is that of Cain and Abel...one brother rising up and striking down another in envy.

With this potential for animosity and violence... one could wonder how humanity could survive as it eventually grew in number and formed collectives...into cities. That is what politics is about. The Greek word for such collective life is polis... from which we get the word politics. A collective of lives... could be disastrous unless there were ways to govern the collective. Some form of governing can serve the good of organizing the mutual exchange of goods and services...establishing fairness... providing protection...and issuing consistent consequences if such basic regard was violated.

It is this understanding that human governance can serve the common good...that led the early leaders of the church to call people to honor and pray for governing authorities... unless they demand that one disobey God. And there is no reason to assume that serving vocationally in government would not be honorable. [2]

Some may be a little cynical of politics and politicians. Maybe we can appreciate giving honor when it's due...but we may be wary of what happens when people seek power.

When Paul speaks of such governance as “God’s servant for your good,” it suggests that the goal of government is to provide for the common good and not the private advantage of some king, emperor, prime minister, or president. It becomes clear that the good which God seeks is rooted in that which uses power to serve the common good rather than serve oneself.

It’s really helpful to see how the desire for a king unfolded among the nation of Israel in Old Testament times. The people of Israel were initially overseen by patriarchs... elder figures... then by those who were referred to as “Judges.” And then the people ask for a king... and the last Judge... Samuel... ultimately raises up a king for the people...and he speaks these final words to the people...

“I have done as you asked and given you a king. Your king is now your leader. ... Now testify against me in the presence of the LORD and before his anointed one. Whose ox or donkey have I stolen? Have I ever cheated any of you? Have I ever oppressed you? Have I ever taken a bribe and perverted justice? Tell me and I will make right whatever I have done wrong.” “No,” they replied, “you have never cheated or oppressed us, and you have never taken even a single bribe.” - 1 Samuel 12:1-4

Samuel says two things to the people that essentially is a warning for them to not miss...nor for us to miss. First he says, “I have done as YOU ASKED and given you a king.” He makes it clear that it was the people who wanted a king. Why is that significant? Because their desire for a king reflected a desire for the power that a king represented.... like the other nations. Israel’s “judges” were not given prestige and palaces like kings. God warns the people about the danger in setting apart such power...because it can be used to serve one’s own interest.

In wanting a strong symbol of power for their nation...they could begin to trust in that type of political power more than in God. They could begin to desire power more than righteousness. That very power corrupted their first king...and those that followed...and in various ways the nation began to trust in the world’s power more than God. That’s a warning for all of us. We can see it in the people of North Korea as they accept a self-serving dictator in exchange for providing a symbol of pride and power. We can see wherever political parties seek power more than actually serving the common good. [3]

The second thing Samuel does is give the people an opportunity to recognize abuses of power by daring to be accountable to them. Samuel asked if he had ever taken anything from the people for his own gain... ever used power unfairly or over others. Samuel reminded them that he had not **defrauded** or **oppressed** or been corrupt in anyway. And as such...Samuel was leaving a legacy for them to keep in mind. These are the types of abuse which those given power will always be vulnerable to. And I believe this exchange gives us something to keep in mind.

So what can we surmise about God’s view of human governance?

Human governance can serve both in its protection and provision.

Human governance can serve human life by the constraint of evil and uniting people for the common good. All human governance should be honored as a potential instrument of God to serve the common good...but not all human governance will reflect God’s will because it is always vulnerable to serving itself...whether the individual or group who has such power.

And what of our role? Our relationship to such governance?

We are all called to participate in serving the common good... through whatever means of influence we may have... whether in neighborhoods, work, or civic responsibility.

We do well to recall that when God created humanity...we were given a role to be managers of this creation... to cultivate the world in it's potential to provide for life. We were created with a unique capacity to be actively involved with managing for the common good. Each of us was created with that nature.

As God forms the unique nation of Israel...God continues to speak into that responsibility... as he speaks to many areas of life in which the common good is crucial for a healthy and fair society. God calls the people to establish justice at all levels... including treatment of foreigners...care for the poor, the widows, and orphans... boundaries against exploiting one another. [4]

And there is a point in which the people of Israel had been exiled... so they no longer were functioning as a distinct nation of their own...and go tells the people through the prophet Jeremiah:

"Seek the welfare of the city... for in its welfare you will find your welfare." - Jeremiah 29.7

God's people... even when they were in exile... were told to "Seek the welfare of the city"... the common good. Quite contrary to any "us vs. them" mentality... God notes that the welfare of the city ... of life for all... could serve their own good as well. And such a role was not found bound within their own national identity and space.

When Jesus taught people to love their neighbors as themselves (Mark 12:30-31) and treat others as they would be treated (Matthew 7:12), he was teaching people to seek the common good. When Paul said, "Do not seek your own personal interests alone, but also the interests of others," he was teaching the common good (Philippians 2:4).

If we follow Christ...we will walk in this world not as selfish tourists ... who care nothing of the people or place we reside in. Nor as entrenched homesteaders ...who only see creating a better temporal life as an end in itself. But rather we be those who sow the signs of goodness... and point to the means of their ultimate fulfilment. We need to be pointers... pointing to the true hope for a sinful world.

So here is the essence of our relationship to human governance.
our foundation...

Our relationship to the politics of this world is rooted in our call to serve the common good which may include our participation in shaping and supporting the God-given potential of human governance.

With that foundation in mind, I want to help us consider what principles can help guide our influence in serving the common good. Jesus called us to love our neighbors...but what principles can help us guide that calling as we seek to do so in our current national democracy?

Let me note that the nature of the relationship between church and government has been one of the most complex and contended throughout the past two thousand years... with great minds devoting enormous thought and writing. [5] So in sharing a few principles to guide us...I share these not as the definitive truth on such issues... but as my best attempt to articulate what I can draw from the Scriptures. So let me share what I believe are...

Some Principles for Political Involvement

That is...some principles for serving the common good through political involvement. [5b]

1. Embrace a “prophetic independence” from any complete allegiance to a particular political party or figure.

I know that this has already been our focus in our first week...and restated today...but I want to be sure to include as a first principle.

Our primary commission is to be united as an alternative community who embodies and extends the life and love of Jesus as a witness to this world.

The most prophetic dynamic of the church is revealing the power of Christ to unite sinners by that which is so significant....that every other earthly identity becomes secondary...a new reality in which we can no longer be divided by identities of Jew or Gentile... slave or free... male or female...because we are one in Christ.

And in that reality... that distinction... we offer the world a sign of the true kingdom that rules. That is why Christ emphasized our witness to the world as our love for one another... our unity in him.

That is why there is an emphasis on how we embrace being distinct as a community... a signpost pointing to something distinct.

2. Recognize the tendency to often see only one or two issues that we may deem “religious,” but in truth there are many issues which matter to God...and to which we can seek His will.

Often when election times arise, there will be a particular issue that becomes the center of a culture war...and many people who embrace a Biblically rooted faith will become engaged it. It will often become THE single issue that people of faith should care about... or perhaps even consider to be religious in nature.

Some of those have included the abolition movement to end slavery ...the temperance movement regarding alcoholic ... the civil rights movements ... the protection of religious freedom ...various economic policiesand abortion.

In every case... at the time it may seem like only one issue really matters to God.

The truth is that everything that effects this whole world matters to God.

So part of the challenge we face...is broadening what we may see as the only issue that really counts in our current view.

This becomes especially significant when we understand that the general draw to one political party over another is often connected to our different backgrounds. If we understand that a significant part of what effects “party affiliation” is due to different life experience... including race, gender, vocation, age... then we can see the value in seeking to understand a more diverse view on what is important in serving the common good.

3. Embrace the power of influence rather than control...persuasion rather than coercion.

I believe that one of the great needs in all of life...is to let go of the false power of control and embrace the true power of influence. And this applies to how we seek to serve the common good in the wider culture.

When we try to establish common good... or moral good... through political control rather than prophetic influence... the consequences will prove to be tragic.

Let me try to help us think about this distinction for a moment.

When I look at the whole of God’s relationship to a fallen world... it seems that he brought the Law as a reflection of his will for humankind. If we look at the initial defining 10 commandments... we can even see that they were by nature a liberating law... because they were given to Israel upon being freed from slavery in Egypt. They were 10 foundations that would lead to a liberated life. So the law reflects something good. However... it would also be that which alone could not change people. The Law is only an outward signpost...not that which can change people in itself.

And when we consider how Jesus declared a new force taking control from evil... he spoke of receiving his life... the working of the spirit... all to fulfill the new law of what Paul spoke of as the love of Christ. Jesus was clear that God was in ultimate control...but he created us with choice.

Now we tend to want to control people and therefore we are quick to see laws and rules as the tool... but I think that proves to conflict with human nature.

I think the 10 Commandments are a profound declaration of what a liberated people should embrace. However... in a democracy... they cannot simply be legislated upon people. They have served as a source to bring agreement about murder and stealing... which we have set into laws...but no one would likely want to create a law enforcing the first commandment...that calls us to worship God. I think we can all imagine that outwardly forced worship would not serve any true good. Worship must be embraced by choice.

When we operate with a reliance on the false power to control others... we will find it generally creates a power struggle ... which we will lose...because we really can’t control others. But when we accept the limits of the power to control...it becomes the opportunity to embrace the power of influence. When we are no longer engaged in the power struggle for control... people can be engaged in the power of influence... of persuasion. We cannot expect to persuade everyone about what serves the common good... but If we can help foster a majority who see the common good in God’s deign and desires...then it can lead to a mutual choice to be set into laws and rules. [7]

And the church can do this with prophetic distinction. This is reflected in what Martin Luther King Jr said...

“The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.” [8]

We are not a tool...not a master...but the conscience to our state. When we let go of trying to control...we will better serve that influence.

4. Be guided by Christ’s compassion in caring for the poor...and empowering the disadvantaged.

The Common Good teaches us to seek what’s best for everyone, beginning with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. You would be hard pressed to find a more clear and consistent call as to how we are to live in relationship to others. [9]

This was understood as the core of God’s nature. As we read in **Deuteronomy...**

“He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.” - Deuteronomy 10:18

It is in the very nature of God and of divine agape love...to be moved to help those in need.

This is what God so often challenged the nation of Israel to remember. This is what Jesus so embodied and espoused. As the early church concluded that the grace of Christ was indeed for all people...and sent Paul to the Gentile world... he said they only asked one thing.... “to remember the poor”...which he said he was already committed to. [10]

How this calling is best applied in practical and political forms should be a matter of honest dialogue. [11] Compassion is served by careful thought. I believe we find this even in the early church. The early church had to discover the need to provide fairness in providing opportunity and resources... but also of recognizing the power of an individual’s personal responsibility.

As the earliest followers of Jesus began caring for those in need, at one point one group had to speak up to express that the widows of Greek background were being overlooked because there was a bias at work in the Hebrew Jews who were managing the distribution. So the community sought to face and fix the social injustice. [12] They had to confront prejudice and discrimination in providing resources because seeking equal opportunity matters.

At another point Paul sees how some lives in the community were able bodied but not working...and he instructs them saying “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” In this case... they realized that caring for those in need involved maintaining one’s sense of personal power and responsibility. [13]

The point is that... we are all to be guided by Christ’s compassion in caring for the poor...and empowering the disadvantaged... even as we may discern that process together.

How this is applied to the role of a government is an issue which I believe may be a legitimate matter of debate. Some may contend that such compassion must be a personal choice...and that it is misguided to create a structure that forces the redistribution of resources. They believe that the nature of what Jesus called for was that of personal charity that is only possible through voluntary personal choice. Others may contend that it is a matter of justice...and that a democratic government in particular... is a reflection of a shared process of choosing structures... and therefore it is a legitimate choice to structure a just and fair allocation of resources. One view tends to trust personal choice rather than government. The other view tends to distrust personal choice and value creating structures to protect the values of justice.

It may seem hard to stay united across such different views. However, I believe that there are two simple truths that can help us respect how others may approach this calling differently. The first is that we can be united in the truth that God does not suggest that we simply should trust either personal charity nor government control. He calls out the problem of both personal greed and governing corruption. So we should find that justice is never resolved by one side or the other. In essence, there is a legitimate concern for unmitigated capitalism and unmitigated socialism. It seems to me that despite very different views... everyone could agree that there is a reasonable basis to distrust personal human greed...and a reasonable basis to distrust governmental control. So rather than just denounce the other view as inherently morally wrong...we should have space to wrestle with the vulnerabilities that each view has.

Secondly, we can find unity in recognizing that neither view actually defines another person's actual commitment to care for those most in need...and to empower those who are most powerless. We may have different political views on how such a calling is best served...but we can be united in the potential that a person with either view may be personally committed to this calling with sincerity. The more politically liberal should be open to respecting the politically conservative who may be very charitable on a personal level. And the politically conservative should be open to respecting the politically liberal who seeks a structured means to providing for similar needs. So rather than just denounce the other view as inherently morally wrong...we should have space to honor the good that the other may be expressing in their own way.

What unites us in Christ is the significance of a common calling to care for those most in need...and to empower those who are most powerless.

This leads to one last principle...

5. Recognize the difference between principle and policy.

Often what we differ on...is not a central value... but how such a value is best legislated into policy to serve the common good.... and that may also be reflected in different candidates who represent different views.

We can be centered in shared principles ...and then relate with differences as co-discerners of how particular political policies or persons may best serve that central principle.

If there is anything that has stood out to me through the rising political divide...it is how little space there has been for even wanting to identify the common ground.

Those on one side simply see those who support President Trump as those who support the evil of racist white nationalism... a disregard for truth and science... and more.

Those on the other side simply see those who support the Democratic platform as those who support the evil of killing unborn children, unmitigated socialism, and religious contempt.

And of course each side blames the other for the pandemic. (Any of this sound familiar?)

Here is what strikes me... nearly everyone I know on either side... is not drawn to that side because of actually valuing those evils in themselves. They are often aligning with that side because of some legitimate values that they see as better served by their side.... or by how strongly they feel about the evils on the other side. The truth is that nearly everyone realizes at some level that any support for a particular party involves some significant tension... and trade-offs. It's not hard to avoid our own compromises if we just focus on how evil the other side is...toss a few social media bombs. But if we were to actually engage in a real conversation in which we each share the good and the bad... we might discover that there is actually common ground. We may not understand why the other can support the evils they do...but we may understand that they do not value those evils as good...and they may accept them as an alternative to the evil on the other side. That in itself may be a point of common ground... a recognition that despite how strongly we may abhor one evil... we may actually be in a similar position of compromise. We may discover that the other person is struggling with evils associated with their side ...which if we are honest...we are struggling with evils associated with our side.

So I want to invite you to step out beyond the simplicity of self-righteous judgment...and to actually engage with someone you know is on the other side of political perspective... and to ask to have a conversation to better understand and to identify common ground. By conversation I mean something that is not simply an exchange across social media. I mean an actual conversation...ideally face to face through a socially distanced setting or online using Facetime or Zoom.

And I want to challenge us to be very intentional with the goal of identifying common ground. If we seek out such a conversation and then follow our usual path of identifying how foolish and evil their side is...we will gain nothing. What is essential is to actually want to understand... and be willing not to shoot at low hanging fruit...but to validate legitimate concerns... to be open with our compromises...and ultimately to identify common values and principles. It will be essential to state this as our goal up front.

So who might that be for you? It may be someone you have had interactions with...but still have a foundation of relationship with. It may be a neighbor or co-worker with whom you recognize the different sides but you have never engaged much. They may welcome the goal of

exploring common ground. If you can't think of anyone...you can always post to your friends on social media that you would like to have a real conversation with someone who may be more aligned with the other political party. There's a good chance someone will welcome it.

I believe now is the time to learn how to step off the polarizing express and learn to relate better. This November we will have a national election... loaded up with the politics of the pandemic and more. The drama is going to play out like a new episode every day... and while it will try to sound new... it will generally be the same script. We can't avoid the drama or how it will seek to divide us. But I want to suggest that the most valuable investment you can make in both your communal life and your personal growth ...is to become one who can seek to understand...and to identify common ground with others.

I never mentioned voting ...which I hope that all will embrace as a part of our responsibility to try and serve the common good. My hope is that after casting that vote...we will understand that those who cast that vote differently...are not simply our enemies. They are those with whom we have come to recognize as having common ground and common tensions.

Prayer: In this moment... beneath all of the differences that can divide us... we unite in your calling. We pray that you would save us from the drama that will consume us... from pride and contempt and fear. As we may feel the pull of our pride towards what we deem the right side...we pray that you will help us not give to Caesar what is yours... our ultimate allegiance. Help us be united in our common calling to serve the common good. Help us to never forget that our brother or sister is still our brother and sister even when they may not act like it.

Notes:

1. Very notably Paul called upon his rights as a Roman citizen. He saw the good in Roman justice and was bold to draw upon it. When the police told Paul and Silas that the magistrates authorized their quiet release from jail, Paul became indignant: "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out" (Acts 16:37).

In Acts 22, Paul successfully protested a flogging at the hands of the magistrates by asking the centurion a simple question: "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned? . . . I am a citizen by birth" (Acts 22:25, 28). In both cases, the response by the Roman authorities was one of genuine fear, since they had been unjustly violating the rights of one of their citizens (Act 21:38–39; 22:29).

2. We see this role play out very clearly in the role of Joseph and Daniel in the Old Testament. We see this recognition in other New Testament references that call for honoring and praying for such governing authorities.

Romans 13:1-7 (NIV) - Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from

fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 (NIV) - I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

1 Peter 2:17 (NIV) - Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

Titus 3:1-2 (NIV)

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.

More thoughts and resources regarding the view of being called to serve the "common good." Calling People of Goodwill - A compact, pocket-sized booklet, helping thoughtful Christians of all traditions to explore the common good in the Bible. - [here](#)

Christians and the Common Good: How Faith Intersects with Public Life Kindle Edition by Charles Gutenson (Author), Jim Wallis (Foreword)

For the Common Good: A Biblical Perspective on the Role of Government By Sider, Ronald J.

<https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-161282278/for-the-common-good-a-biblical-perspective-on-the>

Scripture and Rebellion, Scripture on the Common Good By Leonard O. Goenaga
<https://selfeducatedamerican.com/2012/04/14/scripture-on-the-common-good/>

3. Jesus spoke of his followers needing to be different...they needed to be leaders who did not lord their power over others...as had become common... but rather who helped others fulfill their life needs.

I discovered something interesting about what some of the founding fathers of his nation feared most. They feared that the country might develop political parties becoming too intent on power over the other... leading to either party imposing their will over the other. If the country became defined by winning power... then the very oppression that they had sought freedom from... would arise in the new country. The idea of serving as public servants would be replaced by speaking of "which party is in power." Human nature can become more focused on having power... at the expense of the common good.

As one article notes, extreme partisanship was seen as the great danger by the first two presidents.

George Washington's farewell address is often remembered for its warning against hyper-partisanship: "The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism." John Adams, Washington's successor, similarly worried that "a division of the republic into two great parties ... is to be dreaded as the great political evil."

From - America Is Now the Divided Republic the Framers Feared: John Adams worried that "a division of the republic into two great parties ... is to be dreaded as the great political evil." And that's exactly what has come to pass. - JANUARY 2, 2020 -

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/two-party-system-broke-constitution/604213/>

4. Amos 5: 14-15 demands, to establish justice in the gate. The gate here being the law court, the negotiating table that could save or destroy a person's livelihood.

5. It is striking how extensive and diverse great minds have sought to understand how the Church should be involved with governments. Early we have the extensive work by Augustine "The City of God" around 400 AD... and later the leaders of the Reformation...both Martin Luther and John Calvin... each of which differed greatly...and near endless writing through contemporary times. Notably, each is shaped in part by the context of the current governing structures. In seeking to identify principles, I have sought to press into the ways of Jesus and the early church as these reflect how the Old Testament and old covenant, often being shaped in a theocracy, is being applied to a people now operating out of a new covenant and in relationship to the wider world.

5b. There are many different principles that could be raised. I chose these as some I felt could best serve a communal process in this time. Others that I might have added if time allowed...

- **Voting** itself (which I did note) reflects the most basic affirmation of investing in the common good...both in exploring the issues and candidates...and then casting a vote.
- **Praying for governing leaders**

As I did include in the paper "Relating Well in Divided Times": Dare to let praying change us. Most of us have been reminded at times that the Scripture tells us to pray for our governing leaders (2 Timothy 2:1-4) and to respect those in authority (Romans 13:1-7). But do we pray? If it has not been easy to pray for those who govern... it may reflect that we have welcomed a spirit of cursing rather than blessing. If we find it hard to pray for our leaders... especially the one's we do not like...it probably reveals how much we need to... not just to change them...but to change ourselves.

- **Embracing the way of Jesus in bearing both exclusive truth and inclusive love.**

One of the challenges that people face...is how to be loving people without compromising truth...or how to be faithful to truth without compromising love.

If we look at Jesus... we see that he taught exclusive truth claims and inclusive love aims.

He held claims about life... about what is right and what is wrong. However, he had love for everyone. He gave everyone his attention... his care... and ultimately his life.

In a world that only knows how to judge people as bad or good by some form of criteria...Jesus was never afraid of telling the truth ...nor of being with those deemed sinners.

In John 8:1-11... the story of the woman caught in adultery... we see how Jesus loves her... by both silencing the shame of fellow sinners....AND then calling for her to sin no more. He shows care for her in countering the type of judgment that the self-righteous will bring...but he still offers the truth of God's design and desires for her life. We may assume in the culture of that day she would have had little contention with carrying on in adultery as being referred to as sin. In some other setting referring to some other sin...she might have initially resented such a claim that her behavior was sinful... but the loving protection would have placed the truth of such claim in form of God's grace.

Jesus says we should love our neighbor ...then goes on to say it is the one who you may find the most culturally offensive sinner... using a Samaritan... one who by way of compromise had violated God.

Jesus said love your enemies. Bless those who persecute you. This had everyone a bit thrown off. The good religious people knew that those who loved their neighbor could only be those who were part of the culturally acceptable. Samaritan's were bad people. They were a people formed by Jews inter-marrying with the pagan Samarian people. They couldn't possibly be deemed to have loved neighbors more than those who had stayed true to the faith. And such judgment would certainly seem fitting of their enemies and persecutors... these were people who did not honor the truth. Jesus had to know that they denied the very truth of God. And indeed he knew it well. Yet that was not to exclude them from love.

Kindness is not to be reserved for those who accept the truth we hold.

Love your enemies. Bless those who persecute you.

Some of us have to ask ourselves if we are more serious about being disciples of the Jesus or of our cable news and social media? Some of us are choosing to enjoy being shaped by that which is the master teacher of judging people as bad and then justifying how we treat them.

It's important to understand what the Bible is saying when it tells us that love does not judge. The way of Jesus is that which may judge ideas...but not judge people. We are not to condemn what we are not in a position to condemn. Some of us find strength in judging people and when we hear that loves does not judge...we hear something that strikes us as weak. But the truth is that it reflects strength to embrace ourselves as fellow sinners who are not in a position to condemn others.

6. Aspects of the Law, including the Ten Commandments, are carried by the moral teachings of the church, but also discerned by human reason and experience amidst the dynamics of life. The Bible contains many signposts for recognizing the operation of God's Law in the world, but it has no blueprint for the complexities of modern economic, political, or social life. Humans have to work out what God demands anew in every generation. Secular people, since they also have the gift of reason and the benefit of experience, can contribute to this ongoing

discernment of the political laws, which may reflect God's Law. Christians are obligated, not only to cooperate with secular people in discerning and doing good works of the Law, but also to imagine and initiate programs that extend human justice. The Law of God is not salvific. All the efforts that God and humans make in the horizontal realm of the Law may lead to human betterment, but they do not save. Rather, God has chosen a particular route to reconcile humans to himself. That route is Christ. God has reached out to call a disobedient and lost humanity to himself through the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is pure gift; in the realm of salvation, humans are completely receptive. Their faith in the saving act of Christ will be acted out in deeds of love, but those deeds of love are the result of faith in God's work in Christ, not a substitute for it. - Adapted from - Benestad, J. Brian. Five Views on the Church and Politics (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology) (pp. 70-71). Zondervan Academic.

7. Note: As the Reformers sought to work out these issues in Europe, it is notable that Martin Luther spoke of this preference for persuasive power over coercive power. John Calvin would initially seek coercive power by seeking to set up a theocracy in Geneva...but it would fail and he had to abandon that approach.

8. From "Strength to Love", a sermon collection

9. To expand on this calling in the Vineyard movement, see [Remember The Poor – What Jesus Said About The Poor – Vineyard USA](#)

10. Galatians 2:9-10 (NIV)

James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. ¹⁰ All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

11. "...agape love strategically aims at those who need it most — the lost, last, and least. It is steadfast; it is utterly reliable. Further, it aims at restoring the beloved to health and mutuality; it does not aim at keeping the beloved dependent. (All of these qualities of love are taught by our Lord in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25 – 27.) Agape love is forgiving; it is willing to break the cycle of endless hurt and recrimination in a world of fractured relationships. (This quality is taught powerfully in the parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11 – 32.) Finally, agape love appears as sacrificial love in a fallen world that does not reward, but rather punishes it, the crucifixion of Jesus being the prime example. Yet, this expression of Christian love toward the needy is complicated by the fact that each individual is not only "exalted," but also "fallen." The poor are sinners too.²⁶ Even in personal relationships, the expression of love for the poor is shaped by prudence. What indeed will be helpful to the needy person? What will restore them to health and independence? Such concerns multiply exponentially when the expression of love in personal relationships is expanded to the expression of justice in social life. Though loving the poor neighbor is sometimes a simple and spontaneous thing, it is often not so. Careful thought must be the companion of love if it is not to become an exercise in sentimentality or worse. Another complicating factor surrounds these questions: Who are the

poor, and why are they poor? What income — or lack of income — defines the poor? Are the poor helpless victims of external circumstances they cannot control? Are they poor because they lack crucial capacities that enable them to contribute to the economy? Are they poor because they are improvident or lazy? The answer to each question conditions how we treat them, not only in our personal relations with them, but especially in impersonal, corporate relationships that aim at justice. In spite of these complications, we Christians are called to love the neighbor, especially the poor. We are to reflect God's agape love for all, both near and far. What, then, are the ways that we express such love? The most important way we love the poor is to share the gospel with them and to invite them into the life of the church. These actions demonstrate our care for their eternal destinies. In addition, these evangelical approaches convey the love of God and the support of the Christian community to the poor in concrete, earthly ways. As we share and demonstrate the gospel — through the teaching and support of the church — we also offer purpose and hope to lives that are often bereft of such goods. Faith and community support are precious gifts that we are called to offer the poor.

Benestad, J. Brian. *Five Views on the Church and Politics (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology)* (pp. 78-79). Zondervan Academic.

12. Acts 6:1-5

13. 2 Thessalonians 3:10-15. See also Genesis 2:15; 1 Timothy 5:8; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11