

Thoughts From Your Pastor

How Did We Get Here? (Week 2)

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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October 12, 2025

So last week, I started sharing with you some of my personal thoughts about politics, morals, and the church. And I had only intended on taking one week to address these thoughts. But if you were here, you know I got a little too excited and I wasn't able to finish. So you graciously allowed me to continue on this week, and I thank you for coming back because this topic can be very difficult.

If you weren't here last week, I would strongly recommend that you go back online. You can watch on YouTube or our website. Go back and listen to that message. Now, some of you may ask, "Why would I take a Sunday morning to talk about these issues?" You may be thinking to yourself, "Pastor, stay in your own lane," right? I should stick to the Bible. Well, that's exactly what I want to do.

I want to get our focus back on Scripture, even when it comes to our views about political things and whatever else. I want us to have a biblical worldview and not simply a political worldview that has a little bit of faith sprinkled in. I think that we have reached this boiling point as a country where those that have remained quiet need to speak up.

And I'm part of that. The unintended consequences of remaining silent has been that only those on the far extremes are talking about these issues. And so the extreme view has become the normal view, even though most people wouldn't agree with it. Therefore, I believe as a pastor, it's my duty, it's my responsibility to actually bring reason and common sense back into the conversation as we look at God's Word.

Now, I know that I'm not the only one wrestling with these questions and these issues of what our response should be to the world we live in as followers of Jesus, because many of you have asked questions. You've sent emails as we talk about this. And as I said last week, I will say it again, "My goal is to stay true to the Word of God and to appoint people to Jesus." That's my goal in the midst of this conversation.

That's my goal every Sunday. That's my goal every day of my life is to point people to Jesus. And I do have to let you know that last week, as we talked about this difficult topic, I did not receive one negative email from anybody in the congregation. All right? And you can applaud for yourself. Now, that means one of two things. Either they were so mad at me that they just left and wrote me off, or it does mean that you and I do agree.

I mean, these are common-sense things as we try to look at Scripture. And so I appreciate that. Now, today, if you want to send me an email because you're discouraged or you don't like what I say, go ahead and do that. But I'm going to be going on fall break for a few days to Brown County, so I won't get back with you for a little bit, all right? So that's the plan. Last week, I began by just giving you some ideas on how we should respond as believers to where we find ourselves.

And the first suggestion that I gave you as I just recap these quickly was number one, stop letting politics divide the church. Our number one goal as followers of Jesus is not to make sure that we remain a Christian nation by whatever means possible. Now, I need to balance that because it might be shocking for some of you to hear

that, to say, "If you were to ask me the question, do I wish that America is or remains or whatever a Christian nation?" The answer is yes.

Of course, I wish that America would be a Christian nation, but my top goal is not to make sure that that stays that way, but it's to point people to Jesus in His Word. As we look at Scripture, Jesus did not need worldly power to transform the world, and neither do we. We don't need worldly power to transform the world. Jesus and His Holy Spirit can do that.

Secondly, I said, "Stop viewing the world through a political lens and start viewing it through a biblical lens." I shared with you last week that I refuse as a pastor to let political parties claim certain biblical morals. I'm not going to let them claim those as their own. My morals are shaped by God's Word, not a political party. I look at God's Word for truth.

Certain things are right or wrong because the Bible says so, not because a political party says so. I gave some examples of this, some difficult examples. And today, I want to share with you three more ways that you and I can fight back against the enemy in this area of faith, politics, and morals because I think for far too long he has had a foothold even in the church.

As I have seen arguments take place online, in the church, across the American church in general. And I think it's time that we take back our ground. So let me pray and then we will look at these. Heavenly Father, I fully understand that talking about politics and religion and the church can be a very touchy or difficult subject. And so we approach it gingerly but yet standing on the truth of Your Word.

I thank you that we do have Your Word, that in a time where truth seems relative to so many that we can stand upon something and say, "No, this is truth." So, Father, as we talk about these things, we, of course, pray that people would take their next step towards you. Father, that you would receive the praise and that lives would be changed and transformed. Maybe even today will bring some freedom and relief to some.

We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. So the first suggestion that I want to give you today for the church concerning politics and concerning the world in which we live in is this. Stop being surprised that there is evil in the world. I think all too often you and I forget that we are in the midst of a war all the time between good and evil, right and wrong. And yet, for whatever reason, we get lulled to sleep and I'm just as guilty of this.

I read about something that happens in our world and I'm shocked by it. And I think, "How does that happen? Why does that happen in our world? Why is it that you and I act so surprised when something evil happens in our world?" Scripture warned us that this was going to take place. The apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 5 verses 15 and 16, Paul says, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil." Well, shocker, right?

The days are evil. Paul knew that. You and I should know that. We live in a sinful and in a fallen world. It is broken and evil exists. And for the time being, God is allowing that evil to exist. 1 John 3:13, John says, "Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. Why is it that you and I are so surprised when we are persecuted because of our beliefs?" John warned us it's going to happen.

Don't be surprised when the world hates you. They are not going to like the morals and the values that you stand upon. Persecution is going to happen, and church, brothers and sisters, fellow believers, now is not the time to cry. Woe is me. And to blame political leaders or the opposite political party or even other believers, this is the time in the midst of persecution for our church to show love and point others to Jesus because of how you respond.

I believe that one of the best ways we have to witness to the world is in our response to persecution. If you and I would respond with love and with grace and with mercy and with compassion instead of with anger and

wanting revenge and rebuke, that many people would notice there is something different about us. I'm not telling you you can't mourn loss. I'm not telling you you can't hate evil, but we need to respond like Jesus.

We don't have to like evil, but it is going to be here and we need to just fight against it with love. Let me give you a real-life example of how this is taking place right now in Steuben County. Some of you may be surprised as you read about this online, and I'm telling you, don't be surprised that evil exists. One of the things that's taking place in our schools this year that they're trying to get started is an organization called Lifewise Academy.

Now, I've done a little bit of research on this, okay? I'm not going to tell you I know the whole organization. There's many of you that have volunteered already for this, okay? But it seems like a very good organization that gives students that go to a public school the opportunity to leave campus, go to usually a church or another setting, and during school hours be taught the Bible. All right? Seems like a fairly good thing. Yes, it's awesome. All right.

So they're trying to bring this to the Angola school system, and people are posting about it online. And all of a sudden, I start seeing all these posts, and people are upset about it, and they shouldn't be allowed to do this and whatever else. And so I start digging a little more into this, and I'm like, "Why do people not like this? It's not forced. It's not something you have to do. The parents have to sign a form saying that it's okay for their kids to do this." And those that are against it use things. They say things like, "Well, it's not fair because my kid feels left out." I'm going, "Well, wait a second.

They could sign up," right? You volunteered to do that. They say that other kids will come back to school, and now my child feels guilty because as they were talking about faith and what they believe, my child feels like they're going to go to hell because they don't love Jesus. And I'm going, "Well, you know okay?" like I understand that that hurts you. Okay. But I mean, I hope that they're doing it in love. They're not just running around telling people they're going to hell. But I'm going, "Okay. So I dug a little deeper.

What is the big deal with this?" And I find out that there's this organization called Secular Education Association that was started. And they're actually having a meeting on October 27th here at the Carnegie Public Library at 6:00 PM where they're going to talk about why life-wise is not good to be allowed in our school. Now, if you go to the meeting, now I'm planning on going to the meeting, okay? If you go to this meeting, it's at 6 o'clock. Can I just ask you, as we talk about this whole political thing, can you be polite?

Can you be nice? Can you listen? They're probably going to say some things that you're going to be like, "Well, that doesn't make any sense." But just be nice and be polite. I'm going because I just want to hear what they have to say and what's going on. And I dug into this secular education association a little deeper. And you know what I find out? When they were founded what their name used to be, this was the original name of their organization, Parents Against Lifewise. This is what they started as, okay? And again, don't be surprised by this, all right?

They don't want their kids being taught. They don't have to be taught, but they're fighting against it. But this is just one way where I think too many of us are shocked that people wouldn't want the Bible to be taught to individuals. Don't be shocked by that. It should not surprise us. But look at all of the good that has happened because of Christianity, because of those that love Jesus. I have talked to many teachers that say, "The more Christianity we can get in our classroom, the better, even those teachers that are not Christians, because there are morals, there are values there.

And so the enemy, if you go to this meeting, please, I tell you this, be nice. The enemy are not these people that are part of this organization. They are not the enemy. Our enemy is Satan. All right? You remember that. These people are being deceived by the enemy. And so our goal is to love them, to care for them, to draw them back. But don't be surprised at the evil that exists in our world. Okay? Number two, stop trying to fight against evil primarily, that's an important word, through political means or human effort.

Stop trying to fight against evil primarily through political means or human effort. Again, I share with you, I believe it is good. It is right. It is holy for Christians to pursue politics. I think that's a good thing and to lobby even with their position for Christian values. But it is more important that we ask God for healing and forgiveness and for Him to do at work. It is good for us to share our voice about what we think is true and what we think is right, but it's more important that we ask God to do a work.

I have said it before, but I will say it again. The problem with our world is the human heart that has turned from God. And no political party can fix that. No laws can fix that. No regulations. No rules can fix that. In the Old Testament, they had a law established that was trying to guide the people. Did it work for the Israelites? No. If you don't know the Old Testament, the answer is an easy no. It did not work. The law could not fix the human heart.

The problem was the heart. God needed to transform a heart. Again, I believe that the best society is the one that follows God's standards and laws closely, as closely as possible. But remember, it is possible to live in a great Christian society and still end up in hell. Did you know that?

If my number one goal is to simply create the best, most healthy, moral society here and now that I am not following my number one command that God gave to me as a follower of Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations. Here's a question that I have. It's a would you rather? What would you rather have? And as you're thinking about what would you rather have, also think about what God would rather have.

A Christian nation where everyone believes they are going to heaven because they live in said nation but are actually going to hell or a corrupt and failing nation with millions of little pockets of true believers who are ruthlessly making disciples. Which would you rather have? I think we all would rather have the latter, wouldn't we? It's okay if the nation's falling apart, if there are true believers, millions of them that are out making true disciples and sharing the love of Jesus.

You see, as you look back on our history as a nation, there was a long time period where if you would ask somebody, "Do you think you're going to heaven? Are you a Christian?" Their response was, "Of course I'm a Christian. I'm American." We missed the boat a little bit there, didn't we? For a long time, and I can't help but think to myself, and this is a sad thought, how many people right now ended up in hell because they thought being a Christian meant being part of a nation as opposed to submitting their life to Christ personally?

What would you rather have a Christian nation where you have millions of people that say they're Christian because they live in that nation but don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ or a failing nation, a corrupt nation where there are millions of true followers of Jesus that are out making disciples who are making disciples? Of course, we'd rather have the latter. And as I thought about this, I would love to have both, wouldn't you? I'd rather have both and both be true.

But as you look at the history of the rise and fall of nations, for whatever reason, as human beings, having both doesn't last very long in a nation. It just doesn't. All right. Number three. Stop being so quick to judge, especially of a person in a leadership position. Here's the truth statement.

Don't make it your personal responsibility to hold every political leader, every media outlet, every government organization, and every pastor or religious leader accountable. Don't make it your goal to hold all of these people accountable. Now, please hear me. These institutions and people need to be held accountable, but I doubt that you are the person to do that, right?

The only exception would be me because you know me. You have a relationship with me. You should be holding me accountable because we know each other. You have a relationship with me. There are others who shouldn't be trying to hold me accountable. And as a side note, and many of you know this to be true, it is usually the ones who know me the least and shouldn't be the ones to hold me accountable that are the ones who want to hold me accountable, right?

Here is another true statement. Unless you know somebody personally or know somebody who knows them, you have first or second-hand information. Don't post about them on social media or publicly malign their character. Did you guys hear that? I need to say that again. If you don't know somebody personally or know somebody who knows them, that you have true and accurate information, don't post about them on social media or publicly malign their character because that's not fair.

It's not right. It's not just. And it's how we have arrived at a place in our world where nobody knows what truth is anymore because everybody is just posting their opinions or what they've heard or I've heard this and you know who knows if the story is correct. Now, I am not telling you that you can't have personal thoughts or opinions about those that are in leadership, those that are running our country or about certain religious leaders.

You're going to have personal thoughts or opinions about them. But if you don't know them personally, it probably isn't fair to publicly talk about them. Do you know what that's called when you publicly talk about somebody without really knowing them or the facts? Gossip. We're commanded not to do that. And yet we live in a world where everybody believes their opinion matters. And can I just tell you, not everybody's opinion matters? And yet, that's the world we live in.

I could say this on a much smaller scale, but leaders and those who are constantly in the spotlight make difficult decisions every day. Every day, they make decisions that you and I could not comprehend making, and they have information and details that we don't. And very often, that information is kept quiet.

Again, on a smaller scale, being a pastor of a church of just this small group, I have had to make some incredibly hard decisions in this position over the last 10 or 11 years. These decisions have impacted lives and families, and still to this day, there are people who hate me because of those decisions. But if they had all the information that I had, I truly believe they would have made the same decision.

But for the sake of my own integrity and for the protection of the integrity of others, I keep that information private, and I allow those people to hate me. Those that are in positions of leadership have the information. They're making the decisions. I pray that you would offer them grace. Here is something that you all know to be true. But the more of a leadership position you have, the more you know this to be true.

Most people believe they can do a better job leading than the person in the leadership position because it's easy for them to look from the outside and say, "Well, that's what I would do," or, "I wouldn't have done that." How many times have you looked at a political leader, a president, a coach, a whatever, and thought to yourself, maybe you watched sports this weekend and you thought to yourself as you're watching somebody coach, oh, that was bad. I would have done this, or I would have done that. Come on, we're all guilty, right?

Coach Van der Waal, you're in here somewhere. There you are. Yeah, he knows what I'm talking about. Trying men's basketball coach. How many times people look at what you're doing? You have all of these details, all this information, and they look at you and they go, "I could do that better," right? Come on. Let's offer some grace, guys. It's why we read what we read in Romans chapter 13. Here, the Scripture says, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.

The authorities that exist have been established by God." Do you know what I don't see in there? I don't see any qualifiers as to whether that person is really a great person or not a great person. I am still to be subject to them. Consequently, then, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. Guys, we are supposed to be obedient, and we've got one more point, and we'll be done.

We are supposed to be obedient to those who are in authority over us up to the point that it contradicts God in His Word. If it doesn't contradict God in His Word, even if I don't like it, and even if I don't like them, I am still supposed to be submissive to them because God has put them in authority. I know that's hard, and we all have

to do that. I hate paying taxes, but guess what? I still pay taxes. Is there anybody that likes paying taxes? Don't raise your hands. That would be weird.

All right? I'll call you. You can pay my taxes, all right? We are to be obedient. Even if we don't like it, we're to be obedient up to the point that it contradicts God and His Word. One more last note. The response of a Christian political leader and a Christian pastor may be different and both be biblical. Now, let me explain this one a little bit.

I did receive some very good emails this last week and had some very good conversations. Different hats require different responses and both can be biblical. And I'm going to give you an example here. Let's imagine there is a judge in a certain city, and he is a Christian judge. He has submitted his life to Jesus Christ. And he is presiding over a case where one individual has murdered another individual.

It is very possible that that Christian judge can put on his Christian hat and look at that person that is guilty and say, "You are forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ." If you will receive forgiveness, God will forgive you. But then he has to take off his Christian hat, doesn't he? And he's got to put on his judge hat. He's been put in a position of authority to make sure that there are consequences for actions. And now he puts on his judge's hat and he says, "Yes, you are guilty."

You are forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ, but you are going to have a consequence for your actions." And He will judge that person and put them behind bars so that they can pay for what they've done. Two different responses, even from the same person, depending on what hat they wear, and you say, "Well, that's a little confusing. What do you mean? A Christian can respond one way in this situation in a different way in this one?" Yes, because there are different positions that we fill. And I will give you an example in a moment.

But I want you to look at Romans chapter 13, verses 3 through 5, because these are not my thoughts. This is coming from the Word of God. "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 you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good." Did you just read that sentence? Again, no qualifiers about who that person is.

They've been put there by God. They've been established by God. He allows them to be in that position. They've been put there for good. But if you do wrong, you should be afraid. For rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. So is it unbiblical for a judge to condemn somebody to a sentence for a crime they've committed? No. That's one of their positions.

They are keeping a just world, a safe world, a fair world. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities not only because of possible punishment, but also as a matter of conscience. Not only do we do what is right in our world and in our society because we don't want to go to jail, but we do what is right because we know that God is our ultimate authority.

And he has put these people in position. And so we should respect them. We should pray for them. We should offer them grace. They have to make hard decisions. They have to do hard and very difficult things. Let me give you one example because this was a great email I received this last week and I just like getting in trouble, okay? One of the things that I mentioned last week that was my biblical view had to do with illegal immigrants as we deal with that in our country and it's a political big thing.

And I said, "Listen, biblically, my response as a follower of Jesus is I'm supposed to love them. I'm supposed to care for them. I'm supposed to do whatever I can to show them God's grace and mercy and whatever else." That is true. That is my Christian hat. At the same time, is it biblical and moral for those in authority who have made the laws to try to make sure that those individuals that have gotten here illegally go back to where they're supposed to be? Is that biblical? Nobody wants to shake their head, but it is.

They've been put in those positions. So I can very much, as a pastor, say, "I don't care how you got here. I'm going to love you. I'm going to offer you grace. I'm going to provide for you." But at the same time, would it be right for me to intentionally try to bypass the law for them or to do something illegal? No. I can't do anything illegal. Should I try to do whatever I can in legal terms to help that person become a citizen? Sure. Why not?

See, now half of you hate me. Half of you don't. Okay. Here we go. You've got to look at it from a biblical perspective. What does the Bible say? Those in authority, they don't carry the sword for nothing. There's a reason. They have to make sure that you know we live in a safe and a fair and a just society. So here's how we're going to conclude today. Hopefully, you see that many of our struggles as believers come in the form of misplaced priorities.

The things we're passionate about, the things we care about are not wrong, but sometimes they just take priority over what should be first. It is not wrong to be political. It is wrong when it becomes more important than following the Word of God. You see the difference. Not wrong to be political, but the Word of God still comes first in everything. Number two, it's not wrong to desire to live in a safe and a well-functioning nation, even a Christian nation, but it's wrong when that becomes more important than trying to rescue the lost.

Misplaced priority. It's not wrong to hate evil and to fight against it. It is wrong, though, to believe that you and I are the ones that we can eradicate it on our own by some kind of political or justice system. Only God can change the heart. It's not wrong to have opinions about certain leaders based on what you know, but it is wrong to publicly malign someone's character when you don't really know them.

We all can be guilty of that. I'm going to end today just like I ended last week. I think the best encouragement I can give you is this. Before you react, before you speak, and I should add a third one on there before you post on social media, take a minute to process your thoughts through the filter of the Word of God. We all should be asking the question, "What would Jesus do? How would He respond?

What does Scripture say?" And that should be our response. As we do our best to love others well and to point them toward Jesus, may we not allow the enemy to get a foothold in any area of our life and not get a foothold in the church, especially when it has to do with politics. I shared with you last week, I cannot express to you how frustrated I am when I watch churches and believers divided over political issues.

Guys, come on. Stay true to the Word. Stay true to the Word. The Scripture says that those outside, those who don't know what we know, they will know us by our love. You are not going to win with hate. We fight with love. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, I know these are difficult conversations, difficult questions that we would ask.

But Father, it's my prayer that we would remain true to you and that even in the midst of these types of conversations, people would take their next step towards you, growing in their understanding of who you are and of how much you love them. Father, as we leave this place, as we go into the community, as we go into the world, would we be a light that shines for you, that tries to bring reason and common sense back into these conversations?

May we not just remain quiet and hide the truth of Your Word, but may we speak it that it would bring hope and life to those who hear it? We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.