

The Separation of Church and Hate

Avoiding Election Infection

April 10, 2016

PRELUDE – Great God Who Saves

Songs – Great God Who Saves

Reading - Psalm 23 Reading

Songs - King of Love; Lord, I Need You

Prayer - Rick

Song - It Is Well

Feature – We Just Disagree

Video Announcements

Video “Preach to the Choir”

Well good morning everyone...I want you to talk to me about what you believe and I want to talk to you to because I know you believe what I do.

If I had a choice I'd only hear my own voice that's why all my friends on my Facebook feed are basically an echo chamber of me and everyone who dissented has since been unfriended.

It keeps me awake at night thinking about how I'm right and all the world would be happy and free, if everyone in the world was just me, me me me me and if you disagree with me then you're a liar because the world is my choir.

It's going to lead to world peace if you just agree with me, if you disagree then get out of my life.

So that's the way to avoid Election Infection.

Just make sure you agree with me!

I'll be passing out my political policy as you leave and just vote like me and we'll be all good and we can all be friends. Wink Wink

Of course I'm kidding but honestly as funny as that song is, it has a lot of truth in it...more than most of us would like to admit.

As Rick and I were discussing the possibility of this series, I told him I had recently been convicted of this kind of thinking sneaking in to my life. I was beginning to get really condescending in my thoughts about people who had political opinions that varied from mine. I shared with him that on a recent trip back home to my parents on the day of the Missouri Primary, I let those thoughts come

out of my mouth in the form of a condescending, disrespectful rebuke for anyone who would vote differently than me. I viewed others as not thinking clearly, of being short sighted and not being as thoughtful, educated and careful as I was being. I found myself thinking, “They are just getting caught up in emotion and the political bandwagon, I on the other hand am thinking this through. I’m clear on why I think the way I think and clearly the way I think is the right way to think and would lead to world peace if you would just all agree with me.”

And that night as I went to bed, I had this sick feeling in the pit of my stomach and I realized I had gotten infected! I had Election Infection. No longer able to see or think clearly, I was infected by the political war and the toxic

sludge was building up inside of me infecting my heart and my mind.

As I drove back home from my trip, I just happened to have a message entitled Avoiding Election Infection on my podcast list. Andy Stanley from Northpoint Community Church in Atlanta had shared this message in January of this year but I was just getting around to listening to it. And as I listened to it on the drive, I had to repent of so much. A lot of what I share with you today is formed out of what I heard in his message and what the Holy Spirit revealed to me about my heart as a result of what I was hearing.

But before we go any farther, I want to do just a quick review from last week.

As Rick said last week, it is imperative that you watch, listen or read each week's message. So if you weren't here for last Sunday's message, "What Matters Most", please please please take the 30 minutes sometime in this next week to catch up.

This topic is way too big to handle in one week so you need to listen to all the messages in this series lest you hear something we aren't saying. You can find the messages on-line at our website under the media tab.

So last week, Rick talked to us about the importance of foregoing a political way of looking at power and embracing a Christian way of looking at power.

A political way of looking at power is easy, it comes naturally, we don't have to work hard to fall into it but a Christian way of looking at power we have to work for. It doesn't come easy because it means we can't focus on being right or being at the top of the heap or having our way in the political process. It means we look to Jesus and trust Him no matter who is in power here on earth, we remember that He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords over all.

Rick shared from the book of Acts about the question the disciples ask Jesus just before he ascends to heaven...

“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Acts 1:6 (NIV)

The disciples are asking the political power question. Are we going to be in power? Jesus basically says, not right now. Someday God will reign over all but for now, you will receive the Holy Spirit and you will have your testimony and that is how you will change the world. Power in the Christian perspective is relying on the Holy Spirit to bring about change in us individually and then the world.

We also learned that our lives are impacted more by what we do than by who is seated in the White House, that for those of us who are Christians we have the unique opportunity to share the Gospel as the disappointment over our political system rises, and that if we are a follower of Jesus we must reject the political way of thinking about power and embrace the Christian way of thinking about power.

And again that is a really really short summary of what Rick shared last Sunday so again be sure to catch up if you weren't here. It's important.

Okay, so back to today's message, "Avoiding Election Infection."

So how did I know and how will you know if you are infected?

I certainly think there might be other ways to diagnose if you have a case of Election Infection but for me the symptoms looked like this.

-An increasing irritability and frustration when reading statements about candidates, parties

and platforms that were not in line with my own thinking.

-A willingness to make snap judgments and derogatory statements about “those people” who were promoting candidates, parties and platforms that were not in line with my own.

-An increasing feeling like the sky was falling and my entire universe would come crashing down if things don’t work out the way I think they should.

And instead of living by these words found in James, Chapter 1:

You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry James 1:19 (NLT)

-And I found myself being quick to speak, quick to get angry and not wanting to listen at all unless of course you were in my choir then I was all about listening to you and shouting Yeah! Exactly! Our side is the best! We are the smartest, most mature, bestest people of all!

-And the symptom that really woke me up...being more concerned with how people voted than whether or not they know Jesus.

Again I know for a fact there are more symptoms but these were the ones most prevalent in me. So how about ya'll? Any of you coming down with a touch of Election Infection?

So what causes the infection?

As Rick spoke last week, I realized that I got infected with Election Infection the moment I took my eyes off Jesus and the Christian way of thinking about power and looked to politics for my hope and embraced the political way of thinking about power.

And I know I'm not alone in this. As we learned last week, the disciples also struggled with this way of thinking. It has existed for a very long, long time. It's so very easy to get pulled in to thinking about power politically.

And when we are thinking about power in a political way we can't comprehend how "we" win if we don't get to sit in the seat of power. If we aren't the winners in the political race, that makes us losers, right? Those of us with

Election Infection get sucked in to believing that if the world is going to change, then political power is the way to do it and so we must win the seat of political power.

Political power can be an idol. An idol is anything that takes the place that belongs only to God. When we “bow down” to that idol we act as if our hope and the hope of the world rests, in this case, on who is in political power.

We become infected with Election Infection when we place our hope and the hope of the world in Bernie or Hillary, Donald or Ted or insert here your favored candidate. It's not that we can't engage in the process, we absolutely can and should but if we put our hope for this world in that candidate or that

party or that platform, we are putting our hope in the wrong thing. We are allowing a lesser thing to take the place that belongs only to God. Only He has the power to transform the human heart and change this hurting and broken world one life at a time.

The high cost of infection:

So we know when we are infected we tend to get amped up, we place our hope in our preferred candidate, party or platform and we know this comes as a result of choosing to see power from the political perspective instead of the Christian perspective and thus giving power to something that cannot possibly change the world in the way that only God can.

And if we are followers of Jesus and we

remain infected, there will be a high cost for us and for the Kingdom.

We will hold so tightly to our political idol that soon we will lose influence and relationships. Remember this ISN'T about having a political opinion, this is about acting as if that opinion and the candidate, party or platform we prefer is the way, the truth and the light and no one gets to heaven unless they vote for Bernie, Hillary, Donald, Ted or insert here your personal preference.

When our politics become an idol in our life, when we succumb to that way of thinking, we lose touch with what matters most that Jesus is the way and that he deeply cares for ALL people. Republican or Democrat. Left or Right. They are all precious in His sight!

(Okay I straight up stole that line from Andy Stanley).

But it's so true! If we stay infected, we no longer see people as people but as objects in our way. Complete and total idiots who couldn't think their way out of a paper bag and must be discarded if they don't get on board with our thinking. And when that takes root in our heart, we begin to lose influence with those who don't fit in our "choir".

And by the time we get to the election, we have effectively cut off relationships (intentionally or not) with those who don't think like us.

And I don't know about you but that bothers me. It convicts me. And that's exactly what it

took to wake me up to the fact that I had been infected. I found myself being more concerned with being “right” and getting people to wake up already and see the light that my way was the best way then I was to whether or not they knew Jesus or saw Jesus at work in me. Being right had become the most important thing.

Let me ask you...do you want to be in relationship with someone who demands that they are right, who is unwilling to hear anything you have to say that disagrees with their opinion, who makes it clear that anyone who doesn't think like them is a total moron?

When you hit a rough time are they the people you want to go to? Are you willing to let them speak truth in your life?

Friends this is less about what we say than it is about how we say it and when we say it.

Jesus doesn't say people will be won over to the Kingdom by a political power. He doesn't say they will be won over by our loud, obnoxious, condescending arguments. He says they will be won over by our love. They will be won over as we live our lives through the power of His Holy Spirit at work in us and His transforming power in our lives.

If we don't allow the Holy Spirit to get rid of the Election Infection in us, then we will lose influence with those around us and will risk relationships all over something that will be over in 8 months.

God really nailed me on this. I had to wrestle with that question...am I willing to give up the right to be right for the sake of gaining influence and relationship in someone's life to share with them the message of hope? Or would I rather share the message of my political candidate, party or platform?

Friends if we are followers of Jesus, I think we have to wrestle that down. Are we willing to sacrifice others for the sake of our political opinions?

How do you get rid of the Infection?

Okay I'm just going to assume like me you are thinking you are not willing to pay the price to lose influence and relationships with others, especially those who don't yet know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

So if you realize you have a touch of Election Infection or maybe a full blown case, what do you do? How do you rid yourself of it?

Well step one. Take a deep breath and tell yourself to simmer down. Seriously. When I get amped up, I have to tell myself deep breath, simmer down, think this through.

And then if you've been around NHCC for a while I bet you can guess what I'm going to say is the next step!

You repent and believe. You repent which simply means change your mind and you do a 180 on the way you've been thinking. You admit that you have fallen into the political power trap. You admit that you have been

sucked in to trying to be “right” over everything else. You recognize that hope is not found in the POTUS or any political party or platform.

And then you believe. You believe that Jesus is the hope of the world. That He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and that His way is better than your way. You choose to trust in Him no matter who is winning in the polls or on election day and you remind yourself that He is Sovereign. And then you get back in touch with what matters most to God.

But practically speaking how do you do that?

For me, it has been about getting back to the basics.

In Matthew 22, we read about when a group of Pharisees, the highly religious folks, asked Jesus...

“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?”

Jesus replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

Matthew 22:36-40 (NLT)

The basics...

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all

your soul and all your mind.

AND the second is EQUALLY important

Love your neighbor as yourself.

I don't know about you but I often treat it like it's an either/or not a both/and.

But Jesus says the most important is to Love God AND Love your neighbor. If you only do one of those the other gets out of whack.

We are called to do both!

So for me, I start with getting back to the basics of trusting Jesus. Trusting He is bigger than my fears, wiser than me...ok a LOT wiser than me, able to overcome and the only

one who can truly heal me and this world.

I repent of my trust in a political system to “save” me and those around me and I put my trust back in Him as my only hope.

But I can't just stay there. Jesus makes it clear and I think he does this because he knows just how easy it would be for me to justify my behavior if he didn't add “love others.”

I could say and do a lot of things under the ruse of Loving God and miss the second part of the commandment. It's both and... not either or. I think you and I both know that people have said and done things in the name of the Lord and out of their love for him that couldn't be condoned as loving others as

themselves.

So I go to God, I pray, I let him speak to my heart. I repent of all the ways I'm trusting in myself and others to be and do what only he can be and do.

Then I let him show me how to love others.

So what does that look like specifically in this arena of politics? I think it means I pay attention to the scriptures and what they say. Let's take a look at just a few.

In the infamous "Love" chapter in 1 Corinthians which by the way isn't mean only for couples it says:

If I could speak all the languages of earth and

of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:1-2 (NLT)

So I can be completely right, know everything and have amazing faith but if I didn't love others I'd be NOTHING!

In Matthew 5 we read:

"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the

good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

Matthew 5:43-48 (NLT)

So I am supposed to be kind to those around me and love them and pray for them, even if they are my “enemy”. That’s how people will know we are different.

Last week, Rick shared this verse from Philippians:

Do everything without complaining or

arguing, so that you may be innocent and pure as God's perfect children who live in a world of corrupt and sinful people. You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky as you offer them the message of life.
Philippians 2:14- 16 (GNT)

So we aren't to be complaining and argumentative. We are to shine like stars and to offer those around us the message of life. Notice it does NOT say to force feed them the message of our political rhetoric.

And of course the verse I mentioned earlier from James chapter 1...

You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

We are to be quick to listen, slow to speak and get angry. And trust me that is no easy thing. That's why we have to start with taking a deep breath, closing our mouths or our computers and then repenting and putting our hope back in Jesus because without the power of His Holy Spirit at work in our lives this is a very tall order to be slow to speak and get angry and not just jump on our soapbox or bandwagon especially in a time that is as sticky as it is right now.

According to God's word we are to guard our heart, tame our tongue, speak what is wholesome and uplifting, encourage one another, not gossip or slander, we are to be patient and kind with one another. These things are possible with the Holy Spirit at work in us.

And as he works in us we are able to sit down across from those who think differently than us and we can engage in conversations. We don't get sucked in to mudslinging, sound bite quoting debates that leave a pile of toxic relational sludge and burnt relational bridges.

So let me clarify what I am NOT saying!

I'm not saying you cannot or should not have a political opinion.

I'm not saying you cannot or should not ever share said political opinion.

What I am saying is:

Don't put all your hope in a political candidate, party or platform to save the world.

Don't lose touch with the reality that ALL people of all opinions matter deeply to Jesus and you should treat them as such.

Practically speaking:

-Do NOT assume that everyone in your family, your circle of friends or even in this church vote as you do and hold the same opinion as you.

-Be slow to speak on this issue. If it comes up or you wish to bring it up, take a deep breath, pray and then remember be slow to speak, slow to get angry and quick to LISTEN.

-Don't force feed people your opinion.

-Do not engage in political sparring in non face to face communication platforms such

as Facebook. When it's a hot topic those conversations are best reserved for face to face interactions.

-Do consider modifications that will help you minimize the temperature rising and getting more infected. For instance, during political seasons, I tend to unfollow friends who communicate in a way that amps me up. If I read their posts and I want to spout off a snarky reply, I unfollow them. I do NOT unfriend them. I'm getting their soundbites and so it is making it hard to focus on them as a person and not them as an object. So I unfollow, lest I get poisoned against them. This is especially important with people who having a face to face conversation is near impossible because they live far away and I never see them in person.

-Keep in mind that people arrive at their opinions for a reason. They have a story of their own that forms where they stand on the candidates, parties and platforms. And just as your political opinions and persuasion make total and perfect sense to you theirs make total and perfect sense to them. And of course for every article you've read or stat you've seen, they have read an article or seen a stat that says the opposite.

-And because of that seek first to understand and then to be understood. Sit down with those who think differently and ask questions like these:

So how did you arrive at that viewpoint?

Have you always held that view?

And DO NOT ask those questions in a snarky

or condescending way.

And something amazing can happen when you do that, you might LEARN something. Maybe nothing new about the candidates, or parties but about the person you are talking with. And honestly as you hear their story you will begin to understand why and how they formed their opinions.

I got to experience this recently. A group of us were sitting around chatting and the topic of guns and the rise in concealed carry came up. Pretty sure we were not all on the same page about the topic but as we each shared our stories and why we feel the way we do about it, something happened in me and I think maybe others. That moment when you say...man this is a seriously complex issue with no black or white answer. Each of these

people matter to me and they each have a valid reason for feeling the way they feel about the issue. I wonder how one would create a policy that took in to consideration all our issues. And I believe we parted ways that night with a deeper understanding of one another even though we didn't necessarily agree on the topic.

And it reminded me that when you treat someone like they matter to God (which they do) you will gain influence and build up the relationship.

Because friends we are not talking here about children. You can't control someone else. You can't demand they listen to you. You can't force them to change. And frankly you certainly wouldn't want to be controlled or

forced either. But when you come from a place of humility like Jesus, when you are willing to really love others, to speak kindly and to listen carefully...

You will gain influence and you might not change their political persuasion but you just might change their eternal perspective.

The Lords' Prayer

So in try to keep what matters most in my heart and mind...I slightly modified The Lord's Prayer-Shannon's political season version.

Our Father in heaven,

may your name be kept holy.

Remind me Lord it's all about you. Only you are worthy of worship and praise. It's not

about me. It's not about people listening to me or thinking like me or believing in me. It is all about you.

May your Kingdom come soon.

**May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.**

Your Kingdom is near and now and far and future. Until the day it comes in fullness here on earth, help me to live like the early disciples and let your Holy Spirit and my testimony be winsome to others to increase your Kingdom here. Let me do what is within my power to increase your Kingdom here on earth by living as light in this dark and hurting place.

Give us today the food we need,

Remind me once again that no matter who is in power you will provide for me. I may not have all I want but I will certainly have what I need. For you care for each of us more than we can imagine.

and forgive us our sins,

as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

Forgive me Lord for worshipping at the altar of politics. For looking for hope and redemption from something that cannot provide it. Forgive me for gossiping and slandering those who don't think like me. For devaluing others who matter deeply to you and help me to forgive others as well.

**And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.**

Don't let me get sucked in to the lies the enemy, the world and my own flesh are trying to sell me. Don't let me get distracted from you. I so easily turn to other things for my hope, help me to keep my eyes on you. Guide me back to your path whenever I lose my way.

Have your way in me forever and ever Amen.

And I'd like to invite you to recite along with me the Lord's Prayer as it appears in Matthew Chapter 6, from the New Living Translation.

It's on the screen, let's pray together:

Our Father in heaven,

may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.

Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against
us.

And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.

AMEN

And Father we do pray with sincere hearts
that those words would be true, that you
would help us to keep our eyes on you,
especially when during these next seven-

plus months when Election Infection is highly contagious. Help us to continue to say no to the worship of politics and yes to the worship and adoration of you. For you truly are the one true God, the only one with the power to redeem and restore us and our world. And help us Lord to value people over politics. Help us to see others the way you see them...as valuable and worthy of respect and love. Amen.

So let's all remember take a deep breath, simmer down, and remember LOVE God (not Politics) with all our heart, mind and soul and LOVE others as ourselves and not just those who think like us and are in our "choir".

Closing...Offering; Prayer pastor; Next Sunday