

God & Politics
Session 1 – Citizens

Introduction

The holidays are coming up. And just before that...an election. Where American citizens will elect a president and vice president and senators and congressional representatives at the national and state level. Local officials will be elected. Yards are decorated with pumpkins and propaganda. And here we are as the church in 2020 with a lot of questions. Here are some of the ones you submitted when you registered:

- How does God relate to our government?
- How should Christians relate to our government? How do we see politics through a biblical lens?
- What does separation of church and state mean?
- Should we vote? If so, who for?
- Will God hold me accountable for that vote? Or for not voting? What is the minimum requirement of Christians in the political process?
- Does my vote equal a full endorsement of that candidate's stances on all issues?
- Are some issues more important than others in God's eyes?
 - Should we be for or against: gun control, abortion, environmental protection, graduated or progressive tax rates based on income, same-sex marriage, capital punishment,

¹ This group of questions was compiled and used by David Platt in the introduction to Secret Church 20 "God, Government, and the Gospel." I

immigration restrictions, nuclear weapons, tariffs, military spending, or universal health care?¹

If you are here with us tonight that means you have some level of interest in figuring that out. And you are probably tuned in to the national conversation. Maybe you watched the presidential debate and the vice presidential debate. And maybe after watching those you don't feel you have all your questions resolved.

My wife, who is super sharp and can totally read what is going on in a debate...She hung in for about 30 minutes or so in the VP debate and then frustrated by what she was seeing said you know what, I'm going to go read my book because this book makes more sense to me than what they are saying. The book...hunger games. Maybe you look at the landscape with a little bit of frustration as well. 30-30-40

I hope we provide some hope and clarity tonight for how Christians can faithfully bring glory to God as they live as citizens in the nation God has placed them in.

Let me go ahead and tell you I will not answer all of your questions like you want me to. I had several of you ask...are you going to tell me who to vote for? Cause that would be nice. Yes. Pull out your sample ballot...HAHAHA. YEAH RIGHT. I'm not a politician, I'm a theologian. My area of expertise is not candidate selection, but biblical exposition. I'm going to show you what GOD says from his word.

highly recommend you picking up his book "*Before you vote: 7 questions every Christian should ask.*"

This first session we will talk about a Christian's identity and how that informs our engagement in politics. The second session will talk about a Christian's calling from God. Identity and Calling. They very much overlap and really my goal again is to let God's word speak.

Let me offer a couple of definitions though. Words that I will use tonight that might mean different things to different people.

- Government²: The organization entrusted with authority to perform functions that promote justice for the diversity of individuals and communities under its purview
- Politics: to influence and oversee Government policies
- Worldview: A core set of beliefs that inform what one values
- Christian³: Bible-believing, gospel embracing follower of Jesus
- Church (universal): The body of Christ which includes Christians from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation across time
- Church (local): A group of baptized Christians who are committed to being the body of Christ to one another by coming together regularly and carrying out the functions of a biblical church.

Session 1: Citizens

Here's where we are going in this first session: Christians are citizens of two kingdoms. St. Augustine said we are citizens of the City of God and the City of Man. This is true for all Christians in all nations at all times. And it is understanding these citizenships and how they interact that informs the way we approach politics.

I want to show you how we end up as citizens of these two kingdoms by opening God's word and seeing the story of scripture. Because what the bible has to say about politics is best understood by seeing its overarching storyline. The bible is not a political text book so it won't address every specific political question we have. It was written to reveal who God is, who we are, and how we can be redeemed by God's grace through God's son for his glory. And yet, as we look at the storyline you will see the political implications for Christians emerge clearly. I want to quickly survey the four acts of scripture to show you what the bible says about your dual citizenship identity and give you 8 biblical truths that have a bearing on how we engage politics.

Act 1: Creation – Created by God, in God's image, to know and worship God.

Genesis 1.26-28

² Definitions of Government and Politics from Bruce R Ashford's book *Letters to an American Christian*. Loc 201

³ Definitions of Christian, Church (universal), and Church (local) taken from David Platt's *Secret Church* 20. Pg 9.

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth." -- Genesis 1:26-28

The bible opens by telling us **all people are created in the image of God**. This is one of the most foundational beliefs that the christian worldview is built on. We humans bear the image of God.

Truth: all people deserve to be shown dignity as God's image bearers.

There is something sacred about humans that is different from every other created thing. We bear his image. Which means no matter who you are how old you are what country you are from or what you say or do because you are created in God's image you deserve dignity. Honor. Respect. Your performance, your ideology, none of that will take away the fact you are made in God's image. And you might think I'm talking about one certain agenda item here but what if instead I'm talking about how you talk in private about Donald Trump or Joe Biden? All people deserve to be shown dignity as God's image bearers.

And God set forward a purpose for people. This is our creation mandate.

- Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth
- Subdue the earth and rule over it

Genesis 2:15

The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it.

- Work it and watch over it – this is farming...but more than farming. God gave them his raw materials and said cultivate it. Bring out of my creation all of its potential. Humans, in the image of God, are cultivators. That's where our word culture comes from. Same root word. We cultivate the earth. And we are to do so as an act of submission to our creator.

We are created by a spiritual being, we are in the image of a spiritual being, we are given our purpose to cultivate and rule over the earth by a spiritual being. And this spiritual being...GOD...remained with them in the garden. God created them so that they would find fulfillment in their relationship to something outside of themselves. Specifically in their relationship to him. Which means all humans are hard wired to seek fulfillment outside themselves. And they are to find it in God. That search for fulfillment and practice is worship. It's religion. What I'm telling you is that

Truth: all human beings are deeply and inescapably religious.

We cannot NOT be religious. Regardless of whether you believe in one deity, many deities, or no deity at all...you have an ultimate commitment to something. That's the way the bible talks about religion. It's in terms of ultimate commitment. Devotion. And then...your worldview...it's the set of beliefs that determine your values...that comes from your ultimate commitment.

Here's why this creation truth that we are ALL religious matters: There is an assumption, a very prevalent one, that says you shouldn't bring your religion into politics. And the rationale is that doing so will impede the goal of ethical and equitable governing for all. Take John Rawls – distinguished Harvard professor who said political debate should refrain from any reference to comprehensive doctrines found in world religions and ideologies. Basically in the public square we should pretend to forget all of our own presuppositions that inform the way we see the world. That's the only way we will be able to see "true justice." Called it the veil of ignorance.

The problem is the assumption that we are able to set aside our religious nature when we enter the public square. Rawls viewed religion like clothing that you can put on and take off at will depending on what setting you are in. But you cannot. Because your religion is the central organizer of your thoughts and loves. It's your ultimate commitment. You might hear this and think...he's saying we shouldn't keep religion private...I'm not saying we shouldn't, I'm saying "WE CAN'T!" No one can. No such thing as public nudity. *When it comes to religion.* Massive questions still remain there about church and state and what not. I get it and we'll get there ok.

Act 2: The Fall – Corrupted by Sin, Separated from God

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. 3 But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.'"

4 "No! You will certainly not die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. -- Genesis 3:2-7

This is the catastrophic entrance of sin into the world. God curses them both. And then God puts them out of the Garden. God who walked with them each day no longer walks in their presence. He takes himself away from them. He tells Eve there will be pain in childbirth and he tells Adam there will be pain & frustration in his work. And Romans is going to comment on this moment saying this moment right here led not only to Adam's death...but to the death of all mankind.

12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned. -- Romans 5:12

Sin has spread to all of us. We are all sinners. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. Sin corrupted the image of God in us and now we do not see rightly. And this sin pervades our thoughts and actions. It causes us to be selfish instead of self-less. It causes us to seek power & control instead of giving it away. It causes us to be greedy instead of generous. It corrupts and twists every human heart and it ultimately separates us from God leading to our physical decay and death here and our eternal spiritual death apart from God. And that means a couple of things

Truth: All people are sinners and the governing systems they create are corrupted by sin

This may not sound political but it is deeply so. Because people cannot take off their religion and that includes their capacity and propensity to sin. People sin. And if people sin then lawmakers and politicians sin. Which means they create laws and processes that will be corrupted by sin. We live in a broken and fallen world. And the one who understands this will not ever have their heart too set on a politician or platform to make all things right. This is going to be big in the next session when we talk about the great requirement. Which leads to the next thing:

Truth: Only God can save people and only God can create a perfect government

If all people are sinners, no person can save us from our fallen condition that sin has placed us in. No person or group of people can reverse the curse of sin in us. No political party has

the answer for the problem that plagues humanity. So we as Christians MUST NOT TRUST IN ANY POLITICIAN OR PARTY to do what only God can do. And you might nod your head but again here I would remind you that language matters. How do you talk...or should I say TYPE... about your political views? Is it in absolutes? How do you talk about the other side of the aisle? Or all sides? Do you villainize?

In addition, because of the total effect of sin we know no governing structure will be perfect. You cannot legislate the heart. And the biblical solution is not to make America into a Biblical Nation. In fact that would be a disaster. Because if God wanted to do that, he would have. Instead of giving one nation his government he gave all nations his church. And even that is full of sinners. God's perfect government doesn't come until Act 4.

Act 3: Redemption – New life, new citizenship, new calling

8 But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us -- Romans 5:7-8

13 And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. 14 He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him. -- Colossians 2:13-15

The savior of the world is Jesus Christ. Listen to me because this is deep truth that informs so much about your politics. The gospel says that God in his grace has not left you in your sin. You and I deserve the eternal death we set our hearts on but God in his love and mercy took on sinful flesh...he became sin who knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of God. listen to me he ROSE from the grave in victory over sin, Satan, and death and he REIGNS in victory now.

Pause – You may have come for something else tonight but what I'm telling you that you most need is salvation from your sin.

Truth: God calls everyone to repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin

Please heed Romans 10.9-10

9 If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. -- Romans 10:9-10

This is God's primary agenda. His primary mission. To redeem sinners. And listen when you believe this gospel. It means you declare allegiance to Jesus as your king (Isaiah 9.6; Rev 17.14). It means that allegiance takes priority over allegiance to government. It means you are now a citizens in God's kingdom. And that is where your first allegiance lies.

9 So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, -- Ephesians 2:19

Truth: Followers of Jesus have dual citizenship: we are temporary citizens on earth with eternal citizenship in heaven.

We called this session citizens and this right here is why. Every follower of Christ now has a first allegiance. That allegiance goes way down in the heart. That allegiance is to king Jesus. Which means we bear the name of Christ and we give ourselves to bringing the redemptive hope of Christ to all spheres of life. One of the powerful ways we display his glory is the diversity of our members brought together as one body. Eph 2 is actually talking about a cultural barrier that Christ tore down. And we all together say with the apostle Paul in Philippians 2.1

For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain

The short-hand way I've heard it said is that we are NOT the tribe of the donkey or the elephant, we are the tribe of the lamb. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is our first allegiance. And our primary purpose is striving and suffering together for the gospel. This is what matters most. I'M NOT saying your citizenship in America doesn't matter. I actually think because you are God's representative on earth it REALLY SHOULD MATTER. I'm saying our fundamental identity must be our citizenship in heaven.

Truth: Followers of Jesus will never be fully at home in an earthly political party

This is so important. If Christ is your life.... If Jesus is your king, then his agenda becomes your agenda. And listen, I'm NOT saying you should disengage from the politics. That's not the God & Politics forum. In fact its that you SHOULD ENGAGE...whole next session is on calling. But remember your citizenship as you do. Your primary allegiance is to the lamb.

In fact knowing Mercy Church...one of my real joys is to pastor such a politically diverse church. We have people across the spectrum. It's super fun and you challenge me to think well. And here's my call to you again I'll flesh it out next session more. Engage the American political space with passion & conviction...but engage the church with far greater passion. & conviction.

- **Like** your political position & hold it with confidence...**love** your brothers and sisters in Christ and hold the gospel with greater confidence.
- **Chant** loudly at your rally but **SING AT THE TOP OF YOUR LUNGS** when we gather for worship.
- **Agree** with candidates who speak your views...but **SHOUT AMEN** in agreement when God's word is preached.

DO NOT SACRIFICE YOUR FIRST LOVE, YOUR FOREVER KING, YOUR TRUE CITIZENSHIP, YOUR SAVIOR, AND YOUR ONLY REAL HOPE on the altar of a donkey or an elephant. This is why worship here is a celebration. Because it should be more raucous, more joyful, and more passionate than anything else

we give our allegiance to! *Btw some of you don't get that worked up over politics and I'll just say all of that applies to your sports team allegiance as well.*

Because remember: Act 4 is coming...

Act 4: New Heaven & New Earth – The forever perfect government of God

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband.

3 Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.

5 Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new." He also said, "Write, because these words are faithful and true." 6 Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will freely give to the thirsty from the spring of the water of life. 7 The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he will be my son. -- Revelation 21:1-7

What a victory. What a beautiful hope-filled inspiring victory. The kingdoms of this world will all pass away and we will be there. God will DWELL WITH US. The end of grief. The end of crying. The end of pain. the perfect king seated on his throne governing us perfectly and doing so forever. No more thirst because we have the spring of the water of life. DEATH is replaced by life! Corruption replaced by purity. Bodies resurrected. Creation Restored. And we will inherit that which is promised to us in Christ in full.

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the city's main street. The tree of life was on each side of the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations, 3 and there will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever. -- Revelation 22:1-5 (CSB)

No more darkness because the glory of GOD gives us light. NO more curse because of his blessing with us. THIS IS GOD'S PROMISE TO US CHURCH!

Truth: Followers of Jesus are called to bring the hope of God's forever kingdom to bear in their communities and vocations.

Maybe this little visual from Abraham Kuyper will help you out. He said the church isn't to withdraw from the world, instead as God's representatives we are to go out into the world bringing the light of Christ to bear on every area of culture. And seek to redeem it for his glory. Some of you will actually be called into professional politics. PRAISE GOD. Go as a citizen of heaven and seek the good of the city God has placed you in. For his glory.