

1 - “A Political Gospel” // Mark 1:1; Luke 2:1–14 // *Citizens of Another Kingdom #1*¹

Introduction

Open your Bible to the Gospel of Mark. ... I heard a story about some instructions that supposedly appeared in a **Peace Corps** training manual for volunteers serving with the corps in the Amazon rainforest. These were instructions about how to survive an anaconda attack in the jungle. The anaconda, of course, is the largest snake in the world; it can grow to be up to 35 feet long and can swallow a 350-pound animal whole. Here were the instructions:

1. *Don't run.* (They say the anaconda is fast enough to catch you. I say, let the anaconda prove it! And if I am with somebody else, I don't have to be faster than the anaconda, just faster than that guy.)
2. *Lie flat on the ground and keep your arms close to your side and your legs together.*
3. *Tuck your chin in.*
4. *The snake, assuming you are dead, will begin to nudge you and climb over your body.*
5. *Do not panic.* (This one is my favorite: Do not panic!!!! If God designed the panic reflex for *anything*, it was this moment.)
6. *After the snake has begun to examine you, it will begin to swallow you, feet first. It always swallows feet first. Permit the snake to swallow your feet and ankles. Do not panic.*
7. *The snake will then begin to suck your legs into its body. You must lie perfectly still. This will take a long time.* (I mean, honestly, at

this point I'm wondering if the snake is the one who wrote these instructions...)

8. *When the snake has reached your knees, slowly, and with as little movement as possible, reach down, take your knife, and very gently insert it into the snake's mouth between its mouth and your leg. Then suddenly rip upward, killing the snake. (And best of all...)*

9. *Be sure you have your knife.*

“Don't panic.” That's great advice, but depending on the situation, it's easier said than done.

2024 is an election year. Don't panic.

Let's acknowledge: 2020 was not a great year for evangelical Christians with respect to our engagement in the political process; churches were really divided, and here we go again.

We know we're called to engage in the political process, but we also know we should do so as citizens of another kingdom. Which means that while we recognize that politics are important, they are not ultimate. And our vote matters, yes, but our Christian witness matters more.

I'm looking at 2024 like a divine mulligan, a chance to “do over” what we messed up so badly in 2020. So, we're going to take two weeks, this week and next week, to talk about our engagement in the political season coming up. I'm doing this week, and Pastor Bryan will teach next week. Our goal is to give us clarity about how followers of Jesus should approach the coming season, not to be partisan.

¹ Works consulted: Walter Kim, NAE Conference talk; Tim Keller, *King's Cross*; Daniel Darling, “[Bringing Hope to an Election Year](#),” interview with the ERLC, April 2024; Andrew T. Walker, “[The Nations Belong to God: A Christian Guide for Political Engagement](#),” ERLC; *Luke for Everyone*, Tom Wright; *Luke 1–12 for You*, Mike McKinley; William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT.

You say, “*But Pastor, it’s May. The election is not until November.*” Yes, I realize that. We are intentionally doing this now for a couple of reasons: First, I want you to be prepared before you get sucked into the whirlwind. Think of this like premarital counseling: The idea is that you learn how to handle conflict before it comes, so that when it comes you’re ready. Or the importance of buying a knife before you head out into the Amazon. You want it ahead of time.

The second reason I want to do this now is that by the time we get to October, this subject will probably be dominating the airwaves, and I know some of you will be ready to jump out of a window by that point, and I don’t want to add to that by having that be all we think about when we come in here, too. So we’re going to talk about it now—and when people ask me, “*Pastor, when are you going to say something?*” I’m going to point you back to this. Of course, during that season, we’ll lead you to stay engaged in prayer and we’ll also be putting out a series of articles, podcasts, and interviews that address these issues as we get closer.

OK, you ready? Don’t panic. Lie flat on the ground and tuck your chin in ... just kidding. But seriously. Find your inner happy place.

SERENITY NOW!

I’m going to read two very political passages that you probably never realized were political.

Mark 1:1: “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*”

And **Luke 2**, the beginning of Luke’s narrative about the birth of Jesus: “*And in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus*

that all the world should be registered... (And if you jump down to **vs. 9**, “*And an angel appeared to shepherds out in the field and said... ‘Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord...’*” **14** *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests’”* (**Luke 2:1–14**).

We read these verses and think Mark and Luke are just introducing their Gospels or throwing out some historical facts, but they are actually picking a political fight.

To understand that, though, we need to do a quick history lesson.

As Luke indicates, at the time of Jesus’ birth, Rome’s ruler was **Caesar Augustus**. Augustus had ruled the Roman Empire since 27 BC, an empire that stretched from Britain to India and constituted the known world at the time.

Augustus had not always been called Augustus. His original name had been **Gaius Julius Octavian**; he was the adopted son and heir of Julius Caesar.² Julius Caesar, as you may know, was murdered on the Ides of March in 44 BC, and after his death there had been a 17-year-long civil war in which different family members and generals vied for power. In 27 BC, Octavian emerged as the victor (which basically meant he murdered all his competitors before they could murder him). Think of it as the first live action Hunger Games.

Just prior to his victory in 27 BC, a strange new star had been seen in the heavens, which Octavian said was his murdered ancestor, Julius Caesar, ascending into heaven to take his seat at the right hand of Zeus, the supreme Roman God. Well, since Octavian was Julius’ son,

² Augustus was the grandnephew of Julius.

that made Octavian “the son of god,” so he changed his name to Augustus and declared himself to be “the son of god.”³

- **Roman coins** at the time labeled Caesar as the “son of God.”
- Caesar Augustus donned the titles (and I’m not making this up; you can find this in any encyclopedia) “God from God,” “Lord, Savior and Redeemer,” and “the savior of mankind.” His propaganda of the day declared, *“There is salvation in no one else, and there is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved.”*
- In fact, archaeologists have uncovered an **inscription on a calendar** from the Roman city of Priene, 9 BC. These calendars were produced in Rome and sent out to Roman cities. *“The providence which has ordered our lives, showing concern and zeal, has ordained the most perfect consummation for human life by giving us Augustus, filling him with virtue and making him ... a savior who will make wars cease and create order everywhere ... The birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the gospel for the world that came by him.”*⁴ (The account of Augustus’ life and work was literally called “a gospel.”)
- **He even claimed that this was all happening according to prophecy. He often appealed to a prophecy quoted by Virgil in his *Aeneid*** that supposedly dated back to the founding of Rome. That prophecy had supposedly talked about a “promised offspring of Julius” who would be a “son of the deified,” and who would “bring the kingdom of heaven” and “usher in a golden age of

mankind” (*Aeneid*, book 6).⁵ (I say “supposedly” because there is no historical evidence this prophecy actually existed; it seems to be a legend that Virgil just wrote down. There are no ancient records of this prophecy.)

- Caesar’s symbol was the Imperial Eagle, soaring high above the destruction of the earth and bringing on a new kingdom to earth.
- There were two humongous temples that housed all the gods in the Greco-Roman world—temples where they kept statues of all the gods; think of it like a petting zoo of gods—one was the Pantheon in Rome and the other was the Parthenon in Athens, and in front of both of them Augustus put a statue of himself with the inscription, *“Caesar, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.”*⁶
- To be a good Roman citizen, part of your pledge of allegiance included the words “Caesar is Lord.”

Mark 1:1: *“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”* **Luke 2:1:** *“And in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus ... but an angel appeared to shepherds out in the field and said ... ‘Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord...’* **14** *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’”*

Or Revelation 19:16, where John talks about Jesus appearing in glory: *“And on his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, ‘King of kings and Lord of lords.’”*

³ *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 107. For information on the comet, see Augustus’ own *Memoirs*, and www.uic.edu/las/clas/comet/ABSTW51.DOC: “The comet of 44 possesses great historical significance because it came to be interpreted as a sign of Caesar’s apotheosis, and it has been celebrated and written about over the course of many centuries. The Chinese too observed a comet in 44 B.C., and it was quite probably identical with the one seen from Rome. We are fortunate to have this independent evidence of a comet sighting in 44, untainted by any suspicion that it could have been invented merely to lend greater historical significance to Caesar’s murder on the Ides (15th) of March. In Italy, the comet caught the fancy, it seems, of contemporary astrologers and prophets, and centuries later it intrigued the scientific minds of Sir Isaac Newton and Sir Edmund Halley.” See also <http://www.biblicalchronology.com/evidence.htm>.

⁴ PIC

⁵ “Here is Caesar, and all the offspring of [Julius] destined to live under the pole of heaven. This is the man, this is him, whom you so often hear, promised you, ... son of the Deified, who will make a Golden Age again in the fields where Saturn once reigned.” *Aeneid, book 6, lines 790–794.*

⁶ https://www.theposthole.org/sites/theposthole.org/files/downloads/posthole_40_300.pdf

These Bible writers knew exactly what they were doing when they chose this language. They were saying, there is a King of kings and Lord of lords, a Savior of mankind, a Son of God, and it's not Caesar Augustus, it's the Lord Jesus. They were proposing an alternative political gospel. That's why the phrase "Jesus is Lord" was so offensive to Romans. They didn't consider it a private religious confession—"Jesus is MY personal Lord and I follow his religious ways." No, they were saying that Caesar's claims to deserve absolute allegiance because he was able to save mankind was false, because Jesus and Jesus alone is able to save, and he and he alone demands absolute allegiance.

So, that's point #1:

I. We preach an alternative gospel

Caesar, as have many would-be saviors throughout history, promised salvation, peace, a kingdom. Meaning. Happiness. Utopia.

The apostles said, "What Caesar promises, Jesus delivers on." Caesar Augustus entitled his reign "the Pax Romana" (the "peace of Rome"), in which he brought a new era of peace and civilization to the world. But for a lot of people his reign was anything but peaceful.

Those immense building projects that we all love to visit today were accomplished by wringing it from the brows of his subjects. It was estimated that close to 80–90 percent of a person's income in those days was collected in Roman tax. Toward the end of Augustus' reign the Jewish council sent a delegation to appeal to Caesar, saying that his taxes had reduced Israel to a land of helpless beggars.

There was peace as long as you obeyed Caesar's will. If you stepped out of line, his response was brutal. When a group of young Jews, for example, insulted Caesar by pulling down the eagle he'd set up over the entrance of the Jewish temple, symbolizing his dominance, he murdered them all.

The central question of the Bible is, "Who can really save us?" and "Who deserves our absolute allegiance?" Many would-be political saviors throughout history have made similar promises to Augustus. Vladimir Lenin said that if the workers of Russia would unite, peace and prosperity would surely come. But in the process, his administration had to slaughter 20 million people and bring Russia to the eve of economic ruin. One scholar notes that *"one half of all Russian males who died in the twentieth century died of unnatural causes, from war, famine, execution, or imprisonment..."* And we say, "Yeah, that's why we're not socialist or communist; capitalism is so much better." And, I agree that free market capitalism is way better than Communism, but has it delivered on its promises to save? How often have we seen the abuses of unrestrained capitalism? You don't have to look far to find corruption and greed and manipulation, and people shut out of the system, and just emptiness.

I've tried to point this out to my kids over the years, how many of the commercials we watch on TV seem to promise some form of salvation. I feel like I have them decently trained on this now. We'll be watching TV together and some commercial advertising Sprite will come on, and there are people laughing and hugging and dads throwing kids in the air, and they'll say, "Dad, do you think if we drank more Sprite, our family would all get along like that?" and I have a proud moment. They recognize that in a consumer-based culture,

advertisers preach a “gospel.” “This is what your life needs to be complete.”

Technology and education promise salvation. In the late 1960s, a report was given before Congress that claimed that because of the rate of technological advance, within 30 years we would all have to work only 12-hour weeks and have so much free time we wouldn’t know what to do with it! How many of you have so much free time on your hands you don’t know what to do with it? I’m not sure many of us would say that these little supercomputers we carry around in our pockets are the salvation we’ve been waiting for.

The apostles said, “Caesar is a counterfeit. We can respect him as a ruler, of course, and will praise him where he acts justly, but he’s promising something only Jesus can deliver on.”

To be clear, there’s a lot to love and be grateful for about democracy and the respect for individual rights in Western civilization and science and education, but it’s left us far short of the utopia that many of our Enlightenment thinkers and founding fathers and denizens of tech have promised.

Politics today in America, on both sides of the aisle, speak with Messianic tones: *“Believe this. Follow this. Subscribe to this and it will lead us to that glorious peace and happiness we’ve all dreamed.”*

Don’t you believe it. The Christian confession is that Jesus is Lord, not Caesar. Our King is not Caesar or Roosevelt or Reagan. These are all “Little Caesars”: better suited to making pizzas than saving the world. We need a bigger and better Savior. Our King is Jesus, and truly there is salvation found in no one else, and there is no other name under

heaven given among men by which we must be saved. We preach an alternative gospel.

II. We engage in earthly politics, but as citizens of “another kingdom”

This doesn’t mean we disengage from political strategies here. The Christian worldview, after all, has profound political implications, and good politics is a way of loving our neighbor. **God has called his people to be salt and light** in all spheres of society, bringing his *shalom*, his peace, into every dimension. As Abraham Kuyper said, “There is not one square inch of the entire cosmos over which Jesus does not declare ‘Mine!’”

- It can easily be argued that the greatest social benefits the Christian worldview have bestowed on the world are its teaching on the respect for individual liberty and freedom of conscience; the dignity and equality of all people; the importance of the rule of law and the insistence that all people should be equal before it; the inherently corrupting power of authority and the need for checks and balances. These things were largely unheard of before Christians and Jews introduced them.⁷
- I read a fascinating book a few years ago, called *The Poverty of Nations*, co-written by a Christian economist and a Christian theologian, that demonstrated that societies that embrace a flawed view of man and God and how he set up his world to function almost always end up in poverty, and those that embrace what the Bible teaches on those things, even if they don’t acknowledge God as the author of them, flourish. I’m talking about biblical principles of justice and individual responsibility and the

⁷ See also Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*. Holland’s book is (probably) the most accessible and influential expression of this argument.

importance of private property ownership and the corrupting power of sin. These biblical ideas, when taken seriously, always lead to profound human flourishing.⁸

- So, many of the **freedoms and blessings we enjoy today came from Christians** who got involved in politics. And, on the flipside, our greatest societal evils—systematized slavery and racism and bigotry, came from Christians not applying the Christian worldview in the public square. For example, in the Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King, Jr., in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” complained that America was not living in accordance with its Christian worldview when it came to people of color, and he called us back to it.
- So, we can’t pull back from politics and say, “Politics don’t matter. I’m not interested.” We are to be salt and light, applying God’s wisdom to all of creation—business, economics, care for the poor, education, and calling others to the same.
- That’s why 1 Timothy 2 tells us to “[pray] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life...” (1 Timothy 2:1–2 ESV).
- (By the way, it stands to reason, if Paul commands us to pray for this, then we who have experienced the answer to that prayer—we in America now have the Bill of Rights and the First Amendment and can live that peaceful and quiet life Paul prayed for—if we have received the answer to Paul’s prayer—surely he would urge us to pray for, and advocate for, the preservation of these things. In fact, read through Acts and you’ll see that Paul **used any chance he got to advocate for freedoms**. We see him do that before Roman governors, for example, in Acts chapters 16, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 26. Paul seemed to use any chance he had before people in power to appeal for religious liberties.)

- **Jeremiah 29:7** tells us to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” Seeking the peace and prosperity of the city means working for justice, equality under the law, the promotion of education, business, security and defense, and many other things.

So, that means we have a responsibility to engage in politics. You should be registered to vote, and if you’re not I think you’re failing in your Christian civic responsibilities. **But, but**—we do so as citizens of another kingdom. Ultimately, we know that salvation is not found in any human party, only in Jesus, and only he deserves our absolute allegiance.

As important as politics are, we, the church, have an even higher allegiance. One of God’s names in the Old Testament was **Jehovah Nissi**, and it means, “The Lord is my banner.” That means, literally, “The Lord is the flag under which we march!”

You’ve got to choose which flag is on the top of your heart: Republican. Democrat. But, as a Christian, the flag you fly highest must be the gospel flag. Your highest allegiance must be to King Jesus. Your primary identity must not be with the elephant or the donkey or the eagle; it must be the Lamb.

THIS BIBLE was offered on social media. It was endorsed even by one of the presidential candidates. It’s the “God Bless the USA” Bible. It’s got the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence here in the back. And it’s got the American flag imprinted on the cover. Now, let me be clear. I’m thankful for America and I want God to bless America. And I love our Constitution and our Bill of Rights; I don’t

⁸ Wayne Grudem and Barry Asmus, *The Poverty of Nations*.

know of any government charter in history that has been its equal. And I love our flag; I believe it is a symbol of freedom and should be appropriately honored and respected. But do not wrap this Bible in the American flag, and do not put documents from a secular government up next to this sacred text. There is one gospel that saves, and only one flag I fly over the temple of my heart. And that gospel doesn't come out of a courthouse in Pennsylvania or from the portico of a marble-columned building in Washington, D.C. It comes from an empty tomb in Jerusalem. Our hope didn't come riding in on a white horse at the front of a Roman regiment, nor does it come riding in today on the wings of Air Force One. It was born into a manger 2,000 years ago and proclaimed to poor shepherds in a field. Our true King doesn't sit behind the Resolute desk and he does not stand for reelection every four years. He reigns from the right hand of God.

III. We speak the truth that is before, above, and after politics

Because we preach an alternative gospel, and because we have a higher allegiance in King Jesus, we speak the truth that is before, above, and *long after* political parties. They are truths that belong to another kingdom, not ones that are the partisan property of any political persuasion.

I know you agree with that. I'm about to test how much you agree with it. Summit, this is where my heart is most burdened, because it's where we failed so badly last time.

I want to give a few pieces of very specific counsel; some will apply more to those of you who lean right, and others will apply more to those who lean left, and some will apply to everybody. Honestly, I

don't think anything I'm about to say is partisan. I think any Christian of any persuasion whose highest allegiance is King Jesus should agree with these without even blinking.

But let me give an important CAVEAT before I share them: Some of you will try to interpret ONE or another of these as me urging you to vote one way or the other. You'll say, "Oh, in saying that, he means we should definitely NOT vote for this person," or that "we definitely should vote for this one" or that "we should not vote for either candidate." But that is precisely what I'm not doing. In fact, I'm pretty sure some of this counsel will pull you in different directions, or it will at least create tensions in your heart.

Listen, politics is an imperfect process—we try to hold different biblical values in tension and choose the candidate or party that we think will most move the country in the right direction. It's almost always, in a sense, choosing between the lesser of two evils. I'm not saying it doesn't matter who wins, or that there's not sometimes a clearly better choice, or that I don't have an opinion.

I'm just saying that it's my job to give you the biblical values, and your job to put them into your political calculus and make a decision. I don't connect the dots on purpose, and that's because God has called me, as a pastor, to teach the Bible. And that means when I stand in this pulpit, where the Bible speaks, I speak. And where the Bible doesn't speak, I don't speak. Where there is a direct line between what the Bible says and some political policy, I will speak and I will connect the dots. Where there is at best a dotted line (meaning you can't say, "This verse directly commands this particular choice"), then I refrain, even if I have an opinion about which choice is the better application of Christian wisdom. Politics is often just that: the

application of Christian wisdom to specific situations, and that's an important process, but it's not my calling to connect those dots for you. Where there is a direct line—racism is wrong; killing the unborn is wrong—I connect the dots. Where there's a dotted political line, because we're dealing with the application of biblical wisdom, I teach you the biblical truth but refrain from telling you how to apply it.

So, again, to repeat the caveat: I'm going to give you what I believe are some clear biblical principles, and you're going to hear one and think, "Oh, in saying that, he's saying that therefore we must vote for... or not vote for..." I'm not doing that. I'm giving you the unchanging truth that is before, above, and after earthly politics. These are for all Christians everywhere, though some will apply, in our particular moment, more to those of you who lean right, and some will apply more to those who lean left. And I fully recognize that this entire caveat is the *very thing* that social media vultures will choose to leave out so they can pull what I say out of context. But I can't control what you do. I just have to speak the truth.

And can I ask a favor, for this part? If at any point you feel the need to clap, I'd ask you to refrain. Because I don't want this to turn into, "Yeah, you tell them other idiots." OK, you ready? Don't panic. (And, I'm speaking to myself when I say that.)

To those who tend to lean right:

1. Don't equivocate about character

The Bible says that "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach (a curse) to any people" (**Proverbs 14:34**). Immorality, or corruption, or pride, or a tendency to denigrate others, or boasting of

sexual exploits and assaults, has lasting and devastating effects on a nation, especially when associated with those in the highest office of the land.

And don't say, "Well yes, but this candidate gets things done," or "He's better than the other guy so I'll stay silent about his faults so as not to hurt his chances of winning." That is precisely what I'm talking about in this message. When you think that way, you show that you are more caught up in the politics of Caesar than of heaven.

As followers of Jesus, we have to speak from before, above, and after these parties, as citizens of heaven, not earth; as those who testify to the true way, not an earthly way; as children of the Lamb, not the offspring of a donkey or elephant.

Yes, your vote matters, but our witness matters more, and our silence on celebrated wickedness makes it hard for people on the other side to take us seriously about Jesus. Full stop.

2. If you don't like the other side's solution on poverty relief or the promotion of equality, put forward your own

Biblically, we are commanded to care for the poor, to look out for the vulnerable, and to assist the underprivileged. More than 2,000 verses in the Bible command us to do so, and Jesus says in the final judgment that one of the things that will show whether our faith is real is how seriously we took those verses.

If you don't like the strategy of the other side—in other words, if you're the kind of person who says that the Great Society has proven, historically, to be a failure, or that "the greatest argument against

progressive politics is the state of progressive cities,” then what is your solution? If you are someone who feels like big government solutions to poverty relief are not effective or biblically informed, then more proactively put forward your strategy. I mean, it is undeniable that we, as Christians, are called to care for the poor and vulnerable. How do you propose we do that? Let our voices, whatever side of the political aisle we’re on, be the loudest in support of the poor. In the early church, the Roman emperor Julian complained, “Those blasted Galileans take care not only of their own poor, they take care of ours.” We have ministries, Summit, that seek to address poverty and reduce suffering. We need more. How much are you giving so we can do that? How involved are you with them?

The same is true with racial issues. If you don’t like the other side’s solutions to racial inequalities or historic injustices, how are you addressing them? Why was it that majority-culture evangelical Christians, who understood what the Bible says about righteousness and justice and the sanctity of all life, regardless of race, weren’t first in line in the Civil Rights movement? What a stain that is on our history. Let it not be true any longer.

That’s to those who tend to lean right. ... The whole time, if you lean left, you’re like, “Yeah! Get em!” Now, to those of you who tend to lean more left...

3. Call out expressly evil things in your party’s platform⁹

(I don’t mean to pick on those of you who lean left here. As I said, each of these would apply to both parties, and you can certainly

argue that things in both platforms fall far short of biblical ideals of righteousness, justice, and compassion), but there are a few things in the official Democratic Party’s platform that are expressly and devastatingly unbiblical.

The Democratic Party platform endorses, in no uncertain terms, abortion on demand. It says, and I quote directly from their platform,

“We believe unequivocally, that every woman should be able to access ... safe and legal abortion.”

The Democratic Party platform tragically accepts and affirms that men and women can change their gender—in other words, that a boy who thinks he is a girl, for example, is, in fact, a girl. It says, for example, and again, I quote, **“We will work to ... guarantee transgender students’ access to facilities based on their gender identity.”**

These are tragic errors that are wreaking havoc on society, and you can’t be silent on them because you want Democrats to win. If you are supportive of certain Democratic economic or social policies and align yourself with them but don’t speak up about these, then you become complicit in these things. Listen, as of three years ago, there is not a single pro-life Democrat left in Congress. What a tragedy. If you lean left for economic and social reasons like some of my British friends whom, I’ve discovered, are like this—they are as clear and fierce as I am on life and gender issues, but they just see a big role for government involvement in the poor—I’m not saying they are right or wrong; we have some great conversations—just that if that’s you, you have to speak out on clear issues of righteousness, even if it goes against your party. For, just like we noted above, **“righteousness exalts**

⁹ <https://democrats.org/where-we-stand/party-platform/>. Accessed April 29, 2024.

a nation, but sin is a reproach (a curse) to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

Also, to those who lean left...

4. Be wise to the implications of ideological constructs

A lot has been made over the last few years about social ideas like “Critical Race Theory” and “Intersectionality.” And some have pointed out that these theories have sometimes raised helpful questions about what’s going on in society—in other words, they highlighted social dynamics we might otherwise have missed. But what’s also become apparent is that these ideas have ideological roots—that is, assumptions about humans and what’s wrong with us and how to fix it—and these assumptions are pretty drastically at odds with what the Bible teaches.

And here’s the thing: When you uncritically adopt an idea because you like a couple of the observations it makes, and you don’t take time to evaluate the ideological construct behind it through the lens of the Bible, that theory can bring with it its own set of problems and confusion, which can sometimes be as bad, if not worse, as the problems it purports to solve. Critical Theory and Intersectionality have proven to be like that. That doesn’t mean that none of the observations it’s made are relevant or helpful, or that the problems it has highlighted aren’t real. But think of those helpful observations like the nose of a camel. You like the nose and want it in your tent. But when you let it in it brings with it the whole camel and soon you can’t stay in your tent anymore.

Listen, ideas have consequences. Years ago I read a book called *When Helping Hurts*; it wasn’t about Critical Theory or Intersectionality, but it explained that a lot of times our sincere desire to help others only ends up hurting because our approach is built on faulty assumptions and ideas. It’s clear that’s happening with Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality.

And, of course, for those of you who lean right, you have your own worldview ideas that smuggle their way into your thinking. I’ve already pointed out some of them: the idea that this Bible and the American flag are essentially the same, that America’s cause is often God’s cause, or that any political philosophy can guarantee peace and flourishing and that it belongs up next to the gospel, or that God’s kingdom is manifested in a nation-state and its founding documents.

OK, these last two are for everybody, including those of you who feel politically homeless (if Ron Swanson is here, these are for you):

5. Don’t equate secondary strategies with biblical imperatives

In other words, don’t draw straight lines where there should be dotted lines.

David Platt said, “There are certain issues on which every Christian must agree ... even when there is no political method for resolving these issues upon which every Christian must agree.”

In other words, be clear in making a distinction between a straight line in the Bible and a dotted line, when a Bible verse clearly

commands endorsing a particular policy or when you think it is the best application of Christian wisdom.

For example, I don't know any verse in Scripture that enumerates the ideal marginal tax rate. I have opinions about that, and I think that my opinions are based on biblical principles, and are good applications of Christian wisdom, but I have no direct line. Or, I don't know of any direct command on the exact number of immigrants we should let into our country or the processes for them becoming citizens. I know biblical principles that touch on these issues, but how I apply them in most policy decisions is a dotted-line question.

So, **don't draw a direct line where there is only a dotted one, and realize that someone can share your compassion for the poor even when they disagree with your methodology for addressing it.**

6. Never morally equivocate or excuse.

I will hear some say, "Oh yeah, well, our guys may get abortion wrong but Republicans get poverty relief wrong," as if those things were equal. Abortion is the state-sanctioned murder of the unborn. It is wrong to equivocate on that and act like some fault on the other side justifies that one, as if they morally canceled each other out. Abortion is stamping out an innocent, vulnerable life with the state's blessing. Gender confusion wreaks havoc and leads to long-term, nearly irreparable damage in our society. Stop blinding yourselves to that or downplaying it. If you do, it should make you question what flag is waving at the top of your heart.

On the right I'll hear people say, "Well, yes, this candidate says this or that egregious or dehumanizing thing, but he's not as bad as the alternative." Don't do that. Speak unequivocally about righteousness.

Going down these roads of compromise is precisely what belies our alternative gospel. When we think these ways, we show that we are more caught up in the politics of Caesar than of heaven. We are the subjects of King Jesus, and we must always come down on his side. You say, "**Well, but what am I supposed to do when there are only these two presidential candidates?**" I know. I know: 300 million Americans and this is what we came up with? Again, politics is messy—you inevitably end up having to choose between imperfect options, and sometimes between really bad options. But just be clear, in it all, where your ultimate allegiance lies. And never waver on that, not for one second. And whoever you vote for, do so with an awareness of their faults—and a commitment to speak out about them and correct them where you can.

In other words, if you lean left and I go on your FB page or TikTok scroll or Insta reel and all I see you posting is how bad Trump is and nothing about the egregious wickedness of abortion or the troubling embrace of gender confusion by the Democratic party, I have no choice but to think you're more emotionally loyal to the Democratic party than you are to Jesus. And when you lean right and I jump on your page and all I see is how bad the Democrats are on things and no lament and grief on the character of the man who currently heads your party, then I have no choice but to assume the same.

Alright. The snake has reached our knees, hasn't it? Time to use the knife. **Friends, these are toxic waters.** These issues cause deep division in the church. And, in part, I understand why they do: Political issues have consequences. But these issues shouldn't have the power to divide us. Why? Because at the top of our Parthenon of concerns is not a Republican or Democrat Caesar, but the Great I AM. We are his disciples and we stand united in our allegiance to him.

Honestly, sometimes I fear that the reason these things still cause such division in us is that we are more **disciplined by cable news and Mark Zuckerberg's algorithms than we are the Scriptures. I get you for an hour or so each week, and they get you for several hours each day. I can't help but wonder: If we were less influenced by our TVs and phones and more **influenced by Titus and Philemon**, we probably wouldn't have the problems we have.**

Listen, your vote is important. But your witness is more important. Our King has an agenda, and it's not to save America, per se, but to save Americans. Those of us who follow him have this as our primary agenda, too. Your vote is important, but your witness is more important.

So, let me close with these questions: What is this election season going to reveal about the idols and allegiance of your heart? Are you ready to take down the Republican or Democratic flag over the emotional center of your heart and put up Jehovah Nissi instead?

When you see that offensive sign in the yard of your neighbor in a few weeks, the one with the ridiculous generalization about you and blanket endorsement of that candidate you despise, what's your first thought? Sadly, some of us care more about how our neighbor votes

than where they will spend eternity, and doesn't that show we have traded Jehovah Nissi for allegiance to a political idol?

My prayer is that we come to care more about where our neighbor spends eternity than we do about how they vote.

May the flag we wave, Summit Church, be Jehovah Nissi—THE LORD IS OUR BANNER. "The Lord is the flag under which we, the people of The Summit Church, march!" Amen?