

## Grace Baptist Church

TEXT: Psalms 118:8-9

SUBJECT: Who is on the Lord's Side? Politics and Gospel

Four years ago, the American people went to the polls to elect a new President. 53% of them voted for Senator Obama; 45% voted for Senator McCain; and the other candidates got about 2%.

Most of the people who voted that day professed faith in Christ and many of them were Evangelicals, men and women who believe the Bible is God's Word and that no part contradicts any other. Of course, there is no verse in the Bible that tells you to vote for one candidate or the other, but Psalm 119:130 says--

*The entrance of your*

*Words gives light;*

*It gives understanding to*

*the simple.*

In other words, the Bible *illuminates* every part of life and if you live in its light you will become a wise and godly person. This, I think, is a simple, but fair reading of that verse. But if this is true, why did so many Bible-believing Christians get it wrong four years ago? If Mr. Obama was God's man, 47% of us voted against God's man. If Mr. McCain was the Lord's candidate, 53% of us voted for the devil's nominee!

How do we account for this?

### **THREE BAD OPTIONS**

The *easiest* way to explain the split vote is also the *worst* way: The professed Christians who voted for the wrong man did it because they were not true Christians. They said they were, but they were not, because if they had been, they would have voted for the other man, the man you did.

A second option is *slightly* better than the first: The Christians who voted for the wrong man were real believers, but in casting the vote they did, they put their own wishes above God's will.

A third way of seeing it is *quite a bit* better than the first two: The Christians who voted for the wrong man did not do it *on purpose*, but because they misread their Bibles or mistook what they heard on the radio for the leading of the Spirit. Vladimir Lenin called such people *Useful Idiots*, good people who can be fooled into doing bad things.

## **AN ASSESSMENT**

What do we make of these options? I think there's *some truth* in all of them.

Not everyone who calls Jesus 'Lord' is a true disciple, and false disciples in *life* are likely to be false disciples in the *voting booth*.

It is also true that *real* disciples of Christ are not always *good* disciples. We all fail to follow Jesus in some parts of life, and, for some, it's the political part.

When it comes to the foolish and wrong things we do, we can never rule out ignorance and stupidity. We cast stupid and uninformed votes because we're stupid and uninformed!

## **A BETTER OPTION**

While there is truth in all these options, they don't capture *all the truth*. There is another truth in the mix, and it's one we don't like to think about. It makes us uneasy because it seems to cast doubt on the clarity and sufficiency of God Word.

I'll put it to you as bluntly as I can: *Most of what we want to know about politics is not in the Bible directly, and it cannot be justly inferred from the Bible!*

What do *you* want to know about politics? *I* want to know who to vote for, what party to join, what causes to support or oppose, and how to set my priorities.

On all these topics, the Bible says *nothing*. I can read it till my eyes fall out, and I won't find the answers I'm looking for. Because they're *not* there.

## **WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT POLITICS**

So, does the Bible say *nothing* about politics? Oh, no, it says quite a bit about it, but, for the most part, what it says is *not* what we're looking for. This, I think, is a fairly complete summary of what the Bible teaches about politics.

Firstly, the Bible teaches civil government is appointed by God, Romans 13:1.

Secondly, the Bible teaches us to submit to civil governments except when they command us to sin, Romans 13:5; Acts 5:29.

Thirdly, the Bible teaches us to honor our rulers and pay the taxes they levy on us, Romans 13:7.

Fourthly, the Bible commands us to pray for the salvation of our rulers, and for the wisdom to keep the peace and leave the church alone, I Peter 2:1-2.

Fifthly, the Bible tells us our rulers are not divine, our country is not the Kingdom of God, and that the good politics *can* achieve is never complete or permanent, or redemptive. Roman coins bore the image of Caesar and around his likeness, it said, 'Lord and Savior'. The Christians countered this false claim with a true one, saying no one but Jesus is *Lord and Savior*.

This is pretty much *all* the Bible teaches about politics. When you put these things together, and meditate on them day and night, you still don't have the answers you're looking for! You don't know who to vote for; you don't know what party to join; you don't know what causes to support or oppose; and you don't know how to set your political priorities.

This should give us pause. The *clear* teaching of the Bible has got to be more important than the *unclear*, and this goes double for what it *says* as opposed to what it leaves *unsaid*.

But, if the Bible says nothing about foreign policy, or tax rates or healthcare reform, are we *allowed* to have beliefs about them and to vote for the candidates who share them?

Of course we are. As long as we remember what these things are--*opinions*, not the Word of God--and where they belong on our list of political priorities, which is always *under* the Word of God, and never *above* it.

In other words, paying your taxes matters more than changing the tax code. Praying for the President is more important than getting him out of office! God's priorities matter more than your priorities. What the Bible teaches about politics are *the* burning issues of the day, and every day!

This may not be sexy or relevant or to your liking, but it's *true*! Most of what we want to know about politics is *not* addressed in the Bible.

## **WHAT NOT TO DO: THE LAW**

Needless to say, not everyone agrees with me on this. Some think the Bible addresses almost every political matter, and no one is more sure it does than the *Theonomist* or *Reconstructionist*. He believes the Jewish Republic is a model for *all* states under the Lordship of Christ. What God wanted the *Jews* to do then and there, He wants *us* to do here and now. Oh, there may be a few difference at the margin, but in *substance*, the Law of Moses, should be the law of the land.

Not many people are smart (or naive) enough to believe all this, but there's a dumbed-down version a great many Christians believe. When they want to know what to think of a political or social issue, they turn to the Law. For example, if the Law opposes same-sex marriage (and it does, Leviticus 20:13), we should oppose it. All right.

The problem is, the Mosaic Law opposes *many other things* such as planting two kinds of seed in one garden or sewing two kinds of cloth together. Or the greatest pleasure known to man outside Heaven: *Eating bacon!*

The Law of Moses is not a smorgasbord! We're not allowed to pick the rules we like and ignore the ones we don't. If you want to go the Mosaic route, you've got to go the whole way. And that's a dead end, or to quote Peter--

*It is a yoke which neither we nor our fathers could bear.*

Most of the people who believe this are political conservatives, even ultra-conservatives. But they're not the only ones who use the Word of God to advance their own politics.

## **WHAT NOT TO DO: SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

The Evangelical Left can also do this. Thirty or forty years ago, this was a very small movement: there was Senator Mark Hatfield, Jim Wallis, Ronald Sider, and a few others, but only a few. Now the movement is a large one and growing fast, especially among young people and the Emerging churches.

These brothers know the Mosaic Law won't do for the modern world, so they find a part of the Bible *that will* (they think). What part is that? It is the Sermon on the Mount.

To their way of thinking *Blessed are the peacemakers* means unilateral disarmament. *Blessed are the poor in spirit* means redistribute wealth. These may or may not be good social policies, but even if they are, the Sermon on the Mount *cannot* be used to support them.

The Sermon on the Mount is *not* a model for the state; its a model for the Kingdom of God, which our country is not, never has been , never will be, and is not supposed to be! As much as the Evangelical Left vilifies the Christian Right for its Legalism, the movements are exactly the same. Both apply the Scripture where it doesn't belong and where it won't work.

## **WHAT NOT TO DO: ELECT CHRISTIANS**

A third option is more modest than the other two, but no less wrong-headed. Seeing the problem as having too many *wicked people* in office, it wants to elect as many good people as possible, by which they mean Evangelical Christians. The poster girls of this movement are Sarah Palin and Michelle Bachman, both of whom are Evangelical, but sorely lacking in experience and, in my opinion, in gravitas.

Should we elect candidates because they go to the same kind of church as we do? Because they believe in the inerrancy of the Bible or justification by faith? Or the Five Points of Calvinism?

When you apply this way of thinking to any other part of life, you see how silly it is. If you have surgery, do you want a good Jewish doctor or a bad Christian doctor? If you fly to Hawaii, do you want an experienced Roman Catholic at the controls or a fervent born again Baptist who got his wings the day before yesterday?

You want a good doctor and a good pilot, whatever his religion. The same is true in politics. Being a good Christian doesn't mean the man will be a good President or Senator, sheriff or dog catcher!

Martin Luther lived his whole life in Christendom where the hope of a godly ruler was evergreen. Yet even he said--

*I would rather be ruled by a wise Turk than by a foolish Christian.*

If the Presidency were a spiritual office, we'd have to look into a man's faith and how well he lives up to it. But the Presidency is *not* a spiritual office, it's a *secular office*, open to people of good religion, bad religion, and no religion.

Jimmy Carter is a born-again Christian, and in my opinion, the worst president in my lifetime. Jefferson and Lincoln, on the other hand, scorned Evangelical Religion, and they're both on Mount Rushmore!

Faith in Christ means everything to the President's *person*; it means very little to his *Presidency*.

## WHAT NOT TO DO: FOLLOW THE EXAMPLES OF THE BIBLE

A fourth option is 'Biblical' in the sense that the people who hold it look to the Bible for their wisdom, and they know that, since America is not Israel or the church, they've got to look somewhere other than the Law of Moses or the Sermon on the Mount for it. Where they go is the *examples* of the Bible.

If memory serves, seven Bible heroes served in Pagan governments. Joseph, Daniel, the Three Hebrew Children, Esther, and Mordecai. Of the seven, the one we know the most about is Joseph, whose political policies are spelled out in the Book of Genesis.

Before we get to his political record, though, let's remember there's not a bad word in the Bible about him. Ten of his brothers were bad men; his father was a mixed bag, but Joseph was a saint of the highest caliber. His sanctity and service, moreover, were of a supernatural quality. Three times, the Bible traces his success to God's Presence and favor--

*Because the Lord was with him.*

It would be wonderful to have a man of Joseph's character in the White House! But what about his politics? Would we want the President or Mr. Romney to follow Joseph's example in office? Genesis 47:13-26 tells us what he did as Pharaoh's Prime Minister. I don't usually read passages this long in the sermon, but if I don't, you won't believe me. This does not describe his entire political vision, of course; he certainly did many other things, some of which, I'm sure, would be very much to our liking. But here's what the Bible says about his government.

In times of prosperity, he raised taxes.

When the economy went bad, he raised them again, and this time, to the point of bankrupting most Egyptians, vv.14-15.

When the people had no more money to pay their taxes, he took their livestock, v.16

When the livestock ran out, he took their land. When the land ran out, he made them Pharaoh's slaves, v.20

He exempted only two groups of people, the Pagan priesthood, v.22, and his own family, thus protecting false religion and practicing extreme nepotism

Now, which one of you is going to vote for a politician making *these promises*? But this is Joseph's example, and Joseph was a Bible hero. So, what do we do with him?

Hold him up as a godly President? Pray Mr. Obama will confiscate our land? Hope Mr. Romney will move us to other cities? Or should we read the story in context, and get the message out of it that God put into it?

## **SUMMARY OF BAD OPTIONS**

I am not denying that the Bible *ought* to play *some* part in our voting: I very much believe it should! But, we have to use the Bible *Biblically*, and the options I've laid out for you though '*in* the Bible' are not '*of* the Bible'.

The Biblical answer to our political questions is not: (1) the Law of Moses, (2) the Sermon on the Mount, (3) elect more Christians to office, or (4) the Bible examples of godly rulers.

## **WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE?**

I've circled the question as long as I can, now I'm going to answer it: Who does the Lord want you to vote for on November 6th? *It's up to you.*

Christian liberty means, if the Bible does not command or forbid a thing, you are free to do what you want. For example, because the Bible neither commands nor forbids drinking, you're free to drink or not to drink. What you're not free to do, however, is drink without wisdom or brotherly love. What's true of drinking goes double for politics!

What does wisdom look like in the voting booth? To me, it looks like *realism* rather than *fantasy*. What a man has *done* in the past says a lot more about him than what he *promises* to do in the future. His *record* matters more than his *rhetoric*. Wisdom votes accordingly.

What does brotherly love do at the polls? It thinks of *other people's* welfare and not just your *own*. If you believe Mr. Romney's proposed tax cuts will be good for the country, by all means vote for him. But not just to lift the tax burden off your own back and put it on somebody else's!

## **THE GOSPEL**

No discussion of the Bible and politics is complete until we get to the heart of the Bible, and that means, the Gospel.

What is the Gospel? It's the announcement of what God has done in Christ to save us from our sins and to deliver the world from its present bondage. Paul sums it up for us in I Corinthians 15--

*That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that on the third day, He rose again, according to the Scriptures.*

Since the Gospel is an announcement and not a set a rules, it does *not* tell us who to vote for. Still, it provides all the light we need to make wise and godly decisions on Election Day.

What does the Gospel enable us to see? In the first place, it enables us to see--or, see through--all the utopias politicians promise if they're elected. In my lifetime the two Messianic Presidential candidates were Ronald Reagan and Barak Obama. They were great speakers with personal magnetism, and people saw in them something more than 'politics as usual'; they were going to change the world through the force of personality. Of course they didn't, and we shouldn't blame them. They're not up to the job. No man can change the world except Jesus!

If you want to vote for President Obama, that's your right and it's fine with me. But vote for a president, not a Messiah. You don't need a Messiah, because you already have one!

In the second place, the Gospel shows us where we are in the History of Redemption. With the first advent of Christ, the Kingdom of God *came into* the world. What it didn't do at the time is *take over* the world. It formed a church in the world, and that's all it did. The church will remain in the world until the Second Coming of Christ. When Jesus comes, we *will* rule the world, but till then, we're called to *serve* the world.

Part of the service is distinctly Christian: we preach to our neighbors and pray for them. But that's not all we do. We're also called to love them without ulterior motives, to love them for Christ's sake, even if they never believe in Christ.

This is where politics come in. We don't love people by lambasting them. We don't love people by being 'offended' at every politically incorrect thing they say. We don't love people by imposing our will on them or nagging them, condemning them, or shunning them. Or depersonalizing them because of their politics. When I hear partisans on the radio or TV, I wonder if their opponents are even human.

Ann Coulter says *Liberals* as though she means *Reptiles*. In Keith Olberman's mouth, *Republican* sounds like a four-letter word. Conservatives almost spit out the word,

*Obama*, as the Liberals did when they said, *Bush*. I don't know if Rodney King was a Christian or not, but he 'got it'; he understood Biblical Theology better than most Theologians, when he asked--

*Can't we all get along?*

The Gospel says saints and sinners *can* get along in this present world; you can befriend your lesbian neighbor; you can have dinner with the Atheist at work, and you can do it without defiling yourself or lowering God's standards. This is an age of Common Grace, a time when the Lord is good to everyone, whether He's going to save the person or not. He calls us to be good to them too.

His mercy will not last forever. On the Last Day, Jesus will come in Judgment, and you and your unsaved neighbors will be separated as the sheep are from the goats. Till then, you can live together with in friendship and good will. Instead of arguing with your gay neighbor about same-sex marriage, why don't you go bowling with him?

There is a time for separation and judgment. But this *is not* that time! The Gospel says so.

Finally, the Gospel creates a new humanity, people who live together in love and respect without agreeing on their politics. Not because politics don't matter at all, but because they matter far less than our common fellowship with Christ.

Several years ago, someone said, 'Sunday is the most segregated day of the week'. On Monday through Friday white and black people work together, and on Saturdays they might go fishing together, sit alongside each other at a game, or eat at the same lunch counter. But on Sundays, they go their separate ways.

Thank God, this is not as true as it used to be, but if churches have integrated peoples of different colors, what we haven't done such a good job of doing is *integrating people of different politics!* Republican Churches are an abomination to God, and so are Democrat Churches. God wants *Christian Churches!* The terms of church membership are repentance and faith, not repentance and faith and liberal or conservative politics! When a church is centered on Christ, it will have businessmen and union members, public school teachers and homeschoolers, soldiers and conscientious objectors, millionaires and people who live on welfare.

This won't happen unless the Gospel is preached, believed, and lived by.

**OBITER DICTA**

I have never been a popular preacher, but I've always wanted to be. However much they differ in other ways, popular preachers always give us something to do at the end of their sermons, and tonight, I've got one.

On the night of November 6th, some of you are going to be ecstatic; others will be heartbroken. Some will be praising God like David, others cursing the day of their birth like Job. If your man got elected, congratulations and God bless him. If he didn't, better luck next time. But however you feel that night, here's a couple of verses to memorize and live by, Psalm 118:8-9--

*It is better to trust in the Lord*

*than to put confidence in men.*

*It is better to trust in the Lord*

*than to put confidence in princes.*