

# Five Scriptural Principles on Government

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Welcome to our Bible study tonight. Glad that you're all here. We're going to be moving around the Scriptures tonight. I appreciate Jess teaching the last few weeks and I'm looking forward to getting back into Genesis soon but tonight we wanted to talk about how to think about, how to think biblically about elections and living in America, the opportunities we have as citizens of the United States, though we realize our citizenship ultimately is in heaven but the Lord is letting us pass through at this particular point in history, this particular place with the people around us and how do we honor him and give glory to him.

So we want to talk about that tonight, so we're going to be looking at a number of passages of Scripture and I just want to say right upfront that we're going to be sharing some principles that, then now each person applies that is really up to you. I think a lot of this, and you'll see there's a lot of disagreements among believers, you may have seen a statement this week by, last week by John Piper, this week by Al Mohler having different perspectives on how they're voting, and so believers do disagree on these things but it's important for us to think biblically and for each one to make the decision that they believe God is calling them to and not just out of some kind of inner sort of peace that you're looking for. That's not the way we find God's will, we find it in his word. So as we look at the word, we think about the word, we apply the word with a heart that is surrendered and submitted to Christ then he will guide us. So as Romans says in chapter 14, "Let each one do as he's convinced in his own mind," that everything that's not of faith is sin, and so we all need to seek to have a sense of where God is calling us and how we're thinking about things.

So with that in mind, let's go to the Lord in prayer and ask his blessing.

*Our Father, we thank You for this time that we have tonight to study Your word, to consider these matters. We pray that You would, Lord, bless us with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We pray that You would give us open hearts, Lord, humble hearts that are ready to be instructed by You. We acknowledge our great need of grace, that apart from You we can do nothing, apart from You we cannot understand these things, and so we ask You, Lord, to send forth Your light and Your truth, let them lead us to Your holy hill, to the place of Your habitation, the place where Your glory dwells. And we pray that that would be true in this evening and in every day that we would walk closer and closer to the Lord Jesus Christ, worshiping Him in every area of our lives, particularly in the way*

*that we handle our civic responsibilities as citizens of this country. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Okay, so I want to share, as I mentioned, you know, there are going to be different perspectives and one of the challenges for us is to love one another, it is to talk through things, it's not just to not have dialog but I think it's healthy to have dialog. It's important for us to above everything else to love one another and to be patient with one another and speak the truth to one another, help each other think through these things, and so I'm offering these things as I think some biblical principles that I hope will be helpful to you as you process yourself. And I'm going to share five principles about government that I think, then, speak to how we can think about our opportunities because in God's providential dealings with us, we live in a time and a place where we have a role in the government, that in America the government according to Abraham Lincoln is of the people, by the people, and for the people; that we have an opportunity to participate in an active way that many people throughout history have not had. So how do we do that in a way that honors Christ? You know, whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God, so this part of our lives also needs to be done to the glory of God.

So to do that, I think it's important for us to think biblically and so some biblical principles about government. The first one is government, and some of this is going to resonate with some of the things we've been talking about on Sunday mornings but I hope it'll add to that in some specificity. The first point is government is good and is not a necessary evil. Sometimes we can think of government as a necessary evil and I borrow this point, actually, from a talk I heard by Doug Wilson. I don't always agree with Doug Wilson on everything but he's got a lot of good insights and this is one of them. He made this statement: it's not to be seen as a necessary evil. We sometimes can think that, "Well, you know, yeah, because of sin government is just here to restrain evil and so it's actually not a good thing but it's, you know, it's a necessary evil to restrain worse evil." Biblically that's just not accurate. I mean, it is there to restrain evil but it's not merely a necessary evil, it's actually a fundamentally good thing. It doesn't mean that it's always done in righteous ways, not at all, sinners are involved, but the idea of government and authority is intrinsically good.

So the way we know that, well, a passage that is interesting to look at is 2 Samuel 23:3-4, and look at how government is pictured in these verses. 2 Samuel 23:3 in David's last song, he says in verse 3,

3 "The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me [this is what he said], 'He who rules over men righteously, Who rules in the fear of God, 4 Is as the light of the morning when the sun rises, A morning without clouds, When the tender grass springs out of the earth, Through sunshine after rain.'

He says that when government is done correctly, this is what it's like, it's like the beauty of a sunrise and the glory of that and the joy of that as he says, tender grass springing out of the earth, a morning without clouds, the beauty of creation. That's government. That's

not the way we normally think of it and, of course, in a fallen world it's never perfect like this but the idea and the concept is intrinsically good.

So this really goes back to what we talked about a little bit before in Genesis 1 that God actually, he has set himself up, he is King and when he created man, he created us to be under his government. We were not to be independent agents. We were to be submitted under his kingship so that government and authority are intrinsically good. In fact, this is so important, authority is a part of who God is, the Triune God, there's an authority structure, there's an economy of how things work in the Trinity. The Father is the one who administers. The Son accomplishes. The Spirit applies. But there's a sense in which the Son is under the authority of the Father, the Spirit under the authority of the Father and the Son. And so there is in the Godhead some sense of authority and therefore authority is good even though we tend as sinners to see authority not so good and in our experience we see people in authority who in sin do bad things, but it's important to see that the concept is good.

And I think it's going to apparently be a part of the new heavens and the new earth. There will be an authority structure in the new heavens and the new earth. An example of this, there's a number of places you could look but just in the parable of the talents in Luke 19 when Jesus speaks of those are given talents to administer for the master, when they had the accounting, the one who had 10 talents now has 10 more talents and his master says, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You've been faithful in a very little thing. You are to be in authority over 10 cities." So there's authority in the new heavens and the new earth. There's a government structure because God is a God of order. He's not a God of chaos.

So we have to reprogram the way that we think about these things because there's something in us because of sin naturally that grates against these things. We need to and there are times where you do oppose tyranny and there are appropriate places for that, there are ways of appealing but also even opposing evil in authority, but in general we need to see that authority itself is good. So government is good and is not merely a necessary evil.

Second point is government is even more urgently needed in a fallen world. So it really is urgently needed now that sin is in the world to restrain evil. God was always going to work through government. He made us his vice-regents to rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air. I think when you watch Israel, the history of Israel unfold, it's really interesting. You see in Deuteronomy that he's going to have a king. He talks about when the king, "When I put kings over you," and he talks about what godly kings will be like, for instance, they will write out the whole law by hand. They will be obedient to the law of God. So he's going to give them, that's Deuteronomy, then in the book of Judges we're told that one of the problems in the book of Judges was everyone did what was right in his own eyes. In those days there was no king, everyone did what was right in his own eyes, so there was no government, there was no effective government over the people and it led to chaos, moral confusion. You find that refrain four times at the end of the book of Judges, starting with Judges 17:6, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes." Chapter 18, verse 1, "In those days there was no

king." Chapter 19, verse 1, "In those days there was no king." Chapter 21, I think it's verse 16 or 17, the end of the book, verse 25, 21:25, "In those days there was no king, everyone did what was right in his own eyes." And you see in the midst of that some horrific wickedness in the nation of Israel. Sodom and Gomorrah type wickedness.

So the idea is we need a king and, of course, God gives them a king but then in Samuel you have them wanting a king after their own hearts, not a king that God wants to give them, but the point, though, is we need government and it becomes clear. We need Jesus to reign over us. We need to be under authority and you see this really clearly in the book of Romans. It's interesting when you look at Romans and realize the flow of the book, Paul is presenting his gospel and his main point is to say it's all about the message of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. "This is my gospel." But as he expounds that, he makes a case even for the importance of government, the necessity of government. You see it beginning in chapter 1, verses 18 to 32, not explicitly making the case for government but implicitly because in chapter 1, 18 to 32, he tells us about the wickedness of sinful man, that we in unrighteousness suppress the truth, we don't worship God, we turn away from the Lord and we worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator who's blessed forever. Then you have this downward march into increasing wickedness. They didn't honor God. They didn't give thanks. They didn't worship God, verse 21. Verse 24, therefore God gave them over in the lust of their hearts to impurity. He gives them over to impurity so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. So they're dishonoring their bodies. Then in verse 26 because they continue in that, God gave them over to degrading passions and here he's talking about homosexual desires, men burning in lust for one another, committing indecent acts and receiving in their own person the due penalty of their error, verse 27. Then in verse 28, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do things which are not proper. They're being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, they're gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents.

So he says that what man is apart from God's grace, this is what happens to man, and what you have is a picture, this give them over, this verb that's repeated in verse 24, verse 26 and verse 28, is the sense of judicial abandonment. It's a verb of judicial abandonment. To give them over would be used of a judge giving over a convicted felon to the executioner. He gave them over. And so God is judicially abandoning sinners. Sinners are turning away from God, not worshipping God, not honoring God, running away from God, and the picture is almost like they're running up against the fence and they're banging at the fence, "Let us out! We want to give ourselves to our lusts! We want to give ourselves to our sin!" And God's common grace is restraining, restraining evil, restraining evil, and then he gives them over and they break through that fence into the next area now of impurity, defiling their bodies, and they like run across that as rapidly as they can and they're banging against the next level of fence that's restraining them, and they're banging at the fence, pleading to get free. They want God to let them go and he gives them over now to homosexuality, and they go right across that area to the next fence and he gives them over to a depraved mind. And so you see God has to restrain evil. Evil is so great in man that it's his common grace that is restraining evil.

That's the picture of chapter 1, and then chapter 3, he expands on this a little more where he tells, we looked at that recently where he says, "There's none good. No, not one. None who understands. All have turned aside and become useless. There's no fear of God before their eyes. Destruction and misery are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known." And so then he's setting up for but now, praise God, the gospel has come from God, there's a way of righteousness through faith in Christ and salvation happens. And so this is the message that Paul is saying but it's interesting after he expounds on the gospel from chapter 3 really through chapter 11, then in chapters 12 to 16 he gets practical. In chapter 13, he talks about government and it kind of ties together when you look at everything that's already been said. He says in chapter 13 of Romans, verses 1 to 4,

1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good.

So government is good in that it restrains evil and it is a blessing and it is incredibly necessary, especially as you think about what he just pictured in Romans. This is why we need government. If you don't have government, if you throw off government, if anarchy reigns, evil will explode. To take it away does not restrain evil. People say that's the case just like they said, "Let's break through this fence. What we need is to break through this fence and find freedom." And it's more and more bondage, more and more wickedness.

So government is even more urgently needed in a fallen world, that's the second principle. The third principle is government is good to the degree that it accurately promotes good and restrains evil. You can say that government is good in the eyes of God to the degree that it accurately promotes good as good and evil as evil. You see this in 1 Peter 2, another passage where we're told that we're to submit to have a disposition of submitting to government. In 1 Peter 2:13, the Apostle Peter says,

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

So that government is to punish evildoing and to praise right-doing. This is what God has ordained government to be and to do. It is to call evil evil and to punish it, and it is to call good good and it is to reward it or to praise it. This is a key function of government. This means that the policies that a politician, for instance, in a free society where you can vote, you can judge based on the policies of the person, are they supporting policies that line up with what the Bible calls good and what the Bible calls evil. Do they call evil, for

instance, do they call evil good, do they call good evil. If that's the case, then we would see that that is a harmful thing to have a government that praises evil and punishes good, and if we have the opportunity not to support that, we would be in line with what God's purpose for government is. God's purpose is that government calls evil evil and punishes evil. That God's purpose for government is that it calls good good and that it praises good.

So you think about what do politicians support? What do political parties, what are their platforms? And you would evaluate each candidate but, of course, it's helpful to look at what is the party because they've written these things down, the political platforms. What do they say? Are they promoting, are they calling what God calls good good? Are they calling what God calls evil evil? You know, think about this in relation to sexuality and gender. I mean, God says, he calls it very good when he makes man male and female and brings them together in union. Remember in Genesis 1 he saw it was made and it was good, it was good, it was good, and after he creates man male and female, "Behold, it was very good." Then Genesis 2 he lays out for us the path, it's one man and one woman for life. God says that's good. The family is the authority structure. So what does a particular candidate, what does he say about family? Does he have a view of the family that's closer to what God has or not? Does he support policies that are going to advance the family or to hinder the family?

This is something, you know, especially with this whole gender confusion that we're seeing. Isn't it amazing what's happened in the last, when did it start? It's been the last 10 years that, I mean, 10 years ago nobody talked about people identifying as something other than what they were biologically. They might be talking about being a homosexual, they might have same-sex attraction, they might talk about sexual preference, but they weren't talking about, "I think I'm a man in a woman's body, or I'm a woman in a man's body, or today I feel like a man, tomorrow I feel like a woman." And we have to respect that now.

This is the way people are thinking. I mean, that's what people want to do and it comes down to, in a sense, we have an opportunity in voting and I think that's the way we should think about it, we have an opportunity in voting to love our neighbor as ourselves and this is really helpful, I think, when you have a conversation with somebody who may be very angry with you because you have a different view. You know, the Bible teaches that God makes them male and female. The Bible teaches clearly in Psalm 139 that he creates every single person in their mother's womb, that he's the authority and not us, right? In fact, what I just said earlier, doesn't it sound like Judges, everyone did what was right in his own eyes. That is a horrific state of affairs. Read Judges 17-21 and see that, and remember that that's happening in Israel just a few generations after Moses.

Well, so if we let everybody do what's right in their own eyes, it's going to be a disaster and God ordains government to set a standard that doesn't allow that kind of thought process. It doesn't promote evil. One of the candidates was talking recently about an 8-10 year old should be able to have a sex change operation and you just have to accept that, and that's just insane. I mean, you can't drive a car until you're 16, you can't vote until

you're 18 but you can change your body and make a decision, a life-altering change at 8 years old or 10 years old. That is nuts. I mean, think about, I remember, we all have moments where we think crazy things, we struggle. You know, probably a lot of girls, you may remember being, maybe you were tomboyish when you were a girl and you kind of had trouble getting into wearing dresses or guys may have had trouble because you weren't as athletic as you would have liked to have been, or strong or whatever, or you kind of wondered about your masculinity, and there were times where you wrestled with that and some may still have some ongoing things going on with that but all of us can struggle like that in a fallen world. We're sinners. But life and truth are found in aligning ourselves with the truth of God's word and ultimately we know people need Jesus and so that's what we must do is give them the gospel. That's the priority but in the meantime as we have opportunity to promote righteousness in laws, we're actually helping people. If we don't raise a voice against these things and vote in such a way that promotes righteousness, then we're actually not loving people. How can we say we're loving our neighbors as ourselves if we're not trying to help them stay away from the ability to let an 8 year old make a decision like that. And to have the conversation with someone to say, "Listen, I know you really think that you and I really disagree about this but it's not really, you're not really disagreeing with me, you're disagreeing with the Bible and what God says in his word and I'm only saying this because I actually care about you and I care about that child that might make that decision and might then later change their mind and now where are they and what have they done to their bodies by changing all the hormone therapies and stuff, what kind of confusion has been created in the soul." And one of the things they're finding out is people that are going through this gender stuff, the rate of suicide is astronomical because we know you can't just do all these things on your own.

So that's the kind of thing that should inform our thinking. What is a particular candidate saying about things like that? What does he say about pro-life issues? Do they support abortion? How can we support someone who supports the murdering of babies in the womb? God says the baby in the womb is his creation. He's knitting together a person in the womb. One of the most powerful arguments against abortion to me is, again, I mean, there are so many arguments but one that just is really humbling is the fact that John the Baptist in the womb recognized Jesus in the womb when Jesus was only a few weeks past conception, and John the Baptist three months ahead maybe into the second trimester, Jesus in the first trimester, John the Baptist recognizes Jesus and praises him in his mother's womb and Jesus in Mary's womb.

So those things matter. Now all issues matter but we have to think about all of them and look at, you know, and this brings us to the fourth point. We could spend a lot of time there. We're moving on the fourth point: civil government is always led by imperfect people. There are no perfect kings, senators, presidents, congress people, governors. Civil government is always led by imperfect people. I want to mention a couple of things. There's a refrain that you will find in 1 & 2 Kings that's very interesting. The first place you find it is in 1 Kings 15:13-14, and what it basically says there is that Asa walked in the ways of his father, David. He had a heart for the Lord, only he did not remove the high places in Judah. He was king of Judah, he had a heart for God, but he did not

remove the high places. So what are the high places? The high places were false places of worship that were like franchises of worship around Judah that God hated. God hated the high places because you were only to worship God at the temple in Jerusalem. There's one place to worship.

So what this was saying is Asa, in a sense, might of graded out an A- or a B+ but God praises him as a good king, that even though he failed in this area, it was a blessing to the people to have a more righteous ruler than a less righteous ruler. And you find that again and again. It will be like, you know, he left the high places, he didn't remove this other thing, but overall it was a blessing. Then it will talk about the wicked kings and it will say some of them are bad and it will say some are really really bad, and then it will say some are very very very very bad, and the idea is it makes a difference. You're better off with bad versus very very bad and God comments on that in the word. So he bothers to tell you about that. As you read through Kings, you'll see that the northern kingdom is always bad, very bad, very very bad. The southern kingdom you have mostly bad, very bad, but you've got good, very good, really good. But even with the really good, but not perfect. He messed up here.

So what we have to understand is when we're dealing with elections, we're always dealing with imperfect people and I think today it's fair to say that the reflection of the candidates that we have, part of it is a judgment upon our country that we don't have candidates that we've had in the past in ways that, you know, character is more flawed than previously. Though I would say this, that a lot of times in the past we just didn't know how flawed they were because everything wasn't public. You read biographies of people like FDR, John F. Kennedy, and you find out these guys were very very flawed people and the reality is they're always flawed but it's, again, a degree. And again, what is it that God would judge them on, is what are they doing? What kind of policies are they promoting? What are they calling, are they calling good good and evil evil?

And I think it's something that I think, this is my opinion, I think that to have an opportunity to prevent evil from getting worse, it's kind of like I heard Doug Wilson said this joke, he said if Democrats said they were going to burn down Washington, Republicans would counter with a plan to do it over three years. You know, it's kind of like which one you're picking, the poison is running off the cliff at 80 mph, the other is 50 mph. You know, but it's better to go off the cliff at 50 mph, you've got a little more time to maybe get out of the trunk if you're in the trunk of the car or something, somebody is speeding off the cliff, you've got a little more time to figure out a way to get out. And that is, I think that's an appropriate thing.

It's not irrelevant and I think it's, in fact, consistent with what you see in 2 Peter 3:9 when it talks about God who's restraining his justice. He's holding back his wrath. It's coming on the day of wrath. And why is he holding back his wrath, that is, he's allowing injustice to go on but he's doing it purposefully because he's allowing there to be time for all to come to repentance and a knowledge of the truth. And so it's a good thing for God to do that, it's his mercy and his grace to allow more time, and so we have the opportunities possibly by the way we exercise our civic responsibility to promote more time. And



again, it's wisdom, you've got to pray through it, look at it, but it's certainly something I think that is to be considered.

Another thing is I wonder, this was something that one of the other elders shared with me, he said, "I think sometimes people almost have an idolatrous view of their vote, that to vote for somebody somehow is so sacred that I just can't give my vote to this person, he's just too offensive." And you're like, "Well, are we over-valuing somehow our own worth in saying we can't do that, we're above that?" And he was sharing that with me and I thought about an interesting passage in Isaiah 45. It's just something to consider and think about. The language is really interesting here in Isaiah 45. This is written somewhere between like around 715 BC. The person it's talking about will be born they think around 599 or 600 BC. It's like 120-130 years later after Isaiah writes this. Verse 1,

1 Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue nations before him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: 2 "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret places, So that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.

Now I want you to think about something. Cyrus, this is Cyrus the Persian, Cyrus the Great, he is the one who issued the Cyrus edict to let the people, remember in the book of Ezra/Nehemiah that we've been reading, the first return that happened from Babylon to Israel, to Jerusalem, was under Cyrus. Cyrus issued what is called the Cyrus edict and he allowed the people to go back to the land. And so Zerubbabel brings back about 50,000 people of Israel and they come back and they start to build the temple, they're slowed down, then Ezra comes secondly, and then Nehemiah comes later. But Cyrus was the Persian king who defeated Babylon and when you read about Cyrus, though, he was not a believer. He was an idolater. He worshiped many gods. Apparently it was from his own fear of many gods that he allowed all the difference peoples to go back to their land. So he was not a godly man. He was an idolater and yet the Lord of heaven calls Cyrus his servant, "I will take you by your hand, Cyrus, My servant, My anointed, the one that I've anointed to do this work."

So I think that's something to say that God would say he'll take Cyrus and use Cyrus, a wicked idolater, but I'm too holy to vote for this person. Do you see that this doesn't jibe, to me. I mean, you pray about that, consider that, think about it. I know, like I said, this was John Piper's position basically. I disagree with that position. But again, it's looking at the Scriptures.

So the civic government is always led by imperfect people, civil government is always led by imperfect people. So the four principles so far: government is good and it's not a necessary evil, government is even more urgently needed in the fallen world, government is good to the degree that it accurately promotes good and restrains evil, civil government is always led by imperfect people, and fifthly, the most impactful role of civil

government is seen in how it promotes the spread of the gospel. Look with me at 1 Timothy 2:1-8, a familiar passage but it's really good to look at this in light of our present question.

1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

So we're supposed to pray, Paul's telling Timothy who's a pastor of Ephesus, the church at Ephesus that Paul had a deep affection for, he'd ministered three years there himself, now Timothy is there. He's writing to Timothy as a young pastor telling him how to minister and shepherd the people there and he says, "Listen, I want you," after he had given the initial comments in the first chapter, "I want you to make sure that you make prayer a priority and that you're praying regularly for all people, on behalf of all men, including kings and all who are in authority." And he tells us why we pray for kings and all who are in authority, that is, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. But it's not that we live a tranquil and quiet life for our pleasure and comfort, it's in all godliness and dignity. Those two words are important. I mean, tranquil and quiet, peaceful, yes, tranquil, the idea is we pray for kings and those who are in authority so that there is societal tranquility. What you have pictured here is there's law and order. It seems to be that God says that the purpose of government is to promote law and order but not just for the sake of comfort. No, he does say the adjectives tranquil and quiet life, that is, peaceful, but it's a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. Godliness is speaking of the fear of the Lord, that the people of God would walk in the fear of God, that we would not be distracted by social chaos so that we can be focusing on our relationship with God and walking in godliness.

The idea of godliness, it's really helpful to understand the root of it because we think of godliness in the English... Wow, that's some rain coming down. We think of godliness in the English as it sounds in English is, okay, you're like God in sort of your external behavior but the root idea in the Greek is of an internal disposition. The word "godliness" comes from a word which means literally it would be translated "well-directed reverence." *eu* means good or well, like eulogy is a good word, this is *eusebeia*, *sebomai* means to be reverent, to draw back. So it's well-directed reverence. It's the idea of you live your life in such a way and this is actually, I think, a helpful image, the idea of drawing back in the word *sebomai*, it's like you recognize something holy is going on and it changes your behavior. Imagine you come home and you've been gone a while, you don't know what's going on at home, you're just walking in and you're like, "Hey, I'm home. Honey, I'm home." But you realize there's a prayer meeting going on at your house, that somebody's praying, there's some crying going on, you can tell there's something serious happening. What do you do? You don't just keep on talking, "Hey, I'm here now. What's for dinner?" Right? No, you draw back and you pull yourself back because something holy is going on. Godliness is like that, it's the outward behavior that comes from this inner disposition of drawing back and the idea is we're to cultivate lives, hearts, that are continually remembering that all of life is lived in the presence of God,

that everything we do is before the face of God and it's like continually learning that and remembering that so that how what I'm doing over here is before the face of God. Eating your favorite dessert is still before the face of God. And it really makes it better if we learn that because we can actually praise God as we're eating it. It does mean that we have to slow down a little bit and probably have stop maybe earlier than we would have otherwise, but I've learned that it's actually so much better to do that. If you really slow down, to me, I tell my kids this and they get tired of me talking about it. You know, the more you chew and the more you savor it, the sweeter and better it is. So just slow down and savor more. I need to do this. I'm saying this because I need to hear this myself. I have to continually remind myself of that. But it is praising God that you made something taste this wonderfully, "And Lord, okay, I don't need a second piece of cake. I know, so thank You, Lord, for stopping me." And slowing down, I'm now even beginning to realize how full I am so I'm glad I'm not eating it. I would have been miserable in 10 minutes from now and I would have had to probably gain another, you know, little bit of weight because of that.

So anyway, but the idea is everything is in the presence of God, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Everything is in the presence of God. So quiet and tranquility, pray for that so that we can live lives where we are growing in holiness and working on actively our sanctification, helping one another become like Christ, getting involved in each other's lives so that we're promoting this idea that everything is before the face of God, and when godliness then the next thing that flows from that is dignity, in all godliness and dignity, and dignity isn't related to this but this is actually the flipside of it. Godliness is an attitude toward God and something holy and reverent, otherworldly. We realize as humans that we're before him. This word "dignity" is the same kind of concept but it's more human to human, okay? It's the outflow of godliness. When you live your life before the face of God and you understand that everything's in his presence, it creates in you an attitude that people pick up on and it makes you worthy of respect and reverence even from unbelievers. They change the way they talk when you're around. Not all of them but some. You'll see that, right? They don't act the same way when we're walking with the Lord.

And what he's saying is so pray for the government so that this will happen so that you'll be able to live lives like this, that you'll be able to help each other grow in godliness, and being worthy of respect so that the people around you are seeing that and are becoming more mindful of spiritual things. But that doesn't end the passage. Look what he says next in verse 3.

3 This [that is, quiet, tranquil lives because the king and all who are in authority are doing their job well, quiet, tranquil lives] This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

Good and well-pleasing. This is God's will, that we would live tranquil and quiet lives under law and order. This is good and acceptable, but he doesn't say just in the sight of God, he says God our Savior. He's reminding us who God is, he's our Savior. Look what he says next in verse 4,

God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

There is something about the quiet and tranquility of society that allows the people of God to be the people of God and to be seen as the people of God and the gospel to go forth because God wants, this is saying, in one sense, that there is a sense, even though I believe in the electing purposes of God and that God has a special love for his elect and this is not discounted by this, but this is also saying that there's a sense in which God makes the offer of the gospel publicly to everyone and in his heart it's a genuine offer. He really wants people to repent. Now of course, they won't but it doesn't change his heart, the generosity of God. And he wants people to see that. He wants unbelievers to see his generous heart and he's saying they'll see that better normally when these circumstances are present in society. That seems to be what Paul is saying.

And he goes on, he continues on,

5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself [he reminds us of the gospel] as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. 7 For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. 8 Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.

So I want you to pray, wraps it up. It's all about the gospel, and so if we want the gospel to go forth, we should pray for the same things, and I think we can infer from that we also should think about politicians that promote these things, law and order, which seem to be God's priority. Not just because we see God's a God of order and he's a God of law but also because of the advantage that is to the gospel. Now the wonderful thing is even if it doesn't happen, the Lord has a way of taking what even Satan means for evil and turning it around for good, so that when we find ourselves in persecution as the early church said, I think it was Eusebius who said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, so that the gospel goes forth no matter what. But this is right for us to pray this way and to seek that, and it's good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior for us to seek these things.

Now those are the five principles that I wanted to present and I want to mention something else because I would say this really belonged after the second point but I didn't want to get sidetracked by it because I wanted to make sure we got through the five points. The second point was government is even more urgently needed in a fallen world and that's because of sin, and I want to share with you something I think is really important. I want to share with you the beauty of the American government. Now listen to me, don't shut me out right now because you think... I want it to be clear America is not, the United States of America is not God's country. It's not God's nation. God had one nation, that was the nation of Israel and now his nation is the church. It's his people of every tribe and tongue and kindred, that's his nation. You are a chosen race, a holy

nation. He says that to the Gentile church in Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, Peter says that in the chapter we just read a little bit earlier.

Okay, so it's clear that America is not, in some sense, some special thing like that but sometimes we kind of go it's either A or it's B, and it's really not, so often it's not the case and it's especially not the case here. America is not God's nation but at the same time America is not, it's not that it wasn't founded with any kind of Christian principles at all either. It's in between and this is one of the things that I think is disturbing about some of the calls to get rid of America. Listen, the fact is America has many blights on it because we haven't lived up to our principles. Slavery, racism, Jim Crow laws, all of these things are blights and are evils, but there is something profound about America and if you are a student of history and if you'll study history more you'll see this, the beauty of it and it's really neat to talk about the American Revolution versus the French Revolution. They happened within about 20 years of one another and they had radically different outcomes and the difference was at its kernel the difference was the basic view of man in the American experiment, in the basic view of man in the French experiment. And I bring that up because what made the American Revolution what it was, which was something that I think gives us by far the best government on the face of the earth right now, it's not even close, okay? It's not and those of you that come from other countries can say that even better than those of us who are here, and some of you have even told me that. Boone L., ask Boone about it. Victor probably can give an amen there as well, coming from Malaysia, and get Boone talking about America, he will, he'll help you see it in a different way because it's something to come from outside and now experience it.

Now it doesn't mean that we don't have problems still. Of course we do, we're still sinners. Their wickedness is still a viable real reality and increasing reality, right? But what made it was the Protestant Reformation happened in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Bible had been lost in the Middle Ages, the Bible is recovered, Luther and Calvin and Zwingli find the Scriptures, Tyndale, and they begin preaching the word of God and so that the motto of the Reformation was Post Tenebras Lux which in English means After Darkness Light, because the word of God was recovered. The word of God's recovered, the gospel's recovered, and now man has the word of God to be a lamp to his feet and a light to his path, and one of the things that that gospel tells you is what we saw in Romans 1 and 3 that we looked at a little while ago. It tells you that man is inherently sinful and evil. This is the difference between the American experiment and the American Revolution and the French Revolution. The French view was man's basically good. The American Revolution and it wasn't that all of the guys involved were Christians, no, there were some deists but it had a tremendous impact. In fact, if you look at the flow of the Reformation, Reformation doctrine and orthodoxy starts in Germany, you know, spreads to Switzerland, pretty soon German's kind of falling away quicker, Switzerland then falls away, and then it goes to Scotland and England and then to the United States. So what you have in America when people want to talk about like get rid of the system, it's not white, it is concepts, it's beliefs, it's truths that transcend race. It's not about race, it's about truth, and what they got right was that men are evil, and so absolute power corrupts absolutely and the beauty of the system was that they set it up to be a check and balance continually on power, the three branches: the executive, the judicial, the legislative. So

the president and all of his cabinet and the executive branch, you've got congress with two houses, then you've got the judicial and they're all set up to be able to keep one another from having too much power.

And that's been a really effective thing. I mean, there are times where it tends to move a certain way but then there's checks come back the other way. This is one of the things, listen, this is a really big deal. If the Supreme Court is packed, what you'll have and this is really two different visions for America and the Court and it's rooted in the basic fact that the Democratic viewpoint is in the goodness of man. I'm not saying Republicans have it right, they don't either, they just haven't gone as far. They're going slower, remember, at 80 mph versus 50 mph. The fact is that to think that you can add judges and now because what they want to do is they want to legislate from the Supreme Court. They want the judicial branch to be in charge and Amy Coney Barrett is the kind of judge we need, that the founders envisioned because she basically articulated, if you haven't seen her speech that she gave the other night, she only had five minutes but it's outstandingly beautiful presentation of what the purpose of the judiciary is. Basically judges are to restrain their own impulses for policy, they're not to articulate policy or try to advance policy, they're to interpret the law. It's the legislative branch that's responsible to get the legislation to legislate whatever they think they need to legislate. The executive has a check on veto and they can override the veto, and the judicial is just supposedly to say, "Wait a minute, you guys have overstepped. The Constitution says this and you've gone too far." That's the purpose of the judicial, not to legislate. Activist judges want to legislate from the bench. This is what happened when they made same-sex marriage legal. They legislated from the Supreme Court. Why couldn't they get enough people in congress to pass that? If the people wanted it passed, that's how it's supposed to happen. So what they were doing, see, they were already, they're messing up. They're going to get power, absolute power is going to corrupt absolutely.

Now another thing, I was talking to Jack, one of our elders, he is a man who spent his life in law enforcement and he shared something with me that was really interesting. He said, you know, he was talking about this issue of checks on power and so I mentioned three branches, he had a different take on it that was really interesting. He said, "Listen, you also have to think about kind of the wisdom of how it all worked out and really it's just the common grace of God along with some basic thought processes among the people and the culture at that time." He said you have federal, you have state, and you have local and each of those are checks on one another, and it roots out corruption. He was talking about how in he was asked, he teaches around the world at different times and he goes different places to teach about law enforcement, and people ask him sometimes, "How corrupt is it in America?" And he says, "Listen, relatively speaking, corruption in America is zero compared to other countries." Now we say that, well, it can't be zero because it sure looks like it's awfully corrupt at times to me. But relatively speaking it's that much better is what he's saying. I haven't been enough places to evaluate. Jack, if I'm overstating that, I may be overstating what he said so, Jack, I apologize. But anyway, so, but he was basically saying the corruption level is way down here because of the checks and balances.

So he says like think about this. It can be corrupted, government can be corrupted because people are evil. Let's take an example of the suppression of voting rights in the south throughout basically in different places like from the time that the Union soldiers left Mississippi until 1963 or 4 whatever, right? They were suppressing the voting of African American people. That was evil. So the local authorities often would make it where you can't, you know, make a poll test or something, make it where you can't vote. No, you can't vote. Then the state might cooperate with that as well, so you've got two branches, but what happened? The federal government came in and said, "No more." And there are times where the federal government tries to overstep its bounds, this was something he said, he said that in Virginia, Ralph Northam, the governor of Virginia, has outlawed certain kinds of weapons, you know, guns, and the sheriffs, like 53 of 68, I don't know what the numbers were, something like that, 53 out of 68 sheriffs have told Ralph Northam, the governor, they will not enforce his laws in their county because the laws that he passed are against the Constitution of the United States. So you see, you'd have local government checking state government. You have federal government checking local government. So it's all rooted in the idea that if you let anybody have absolute power, we're done because sinners are sinners and people that don't have grace, that don't know Christ, what hope is there for them? There's no hope. It's going to corrupt and include everything.

So America is just one country at one place in time, but what made it something unique and what makes it the place where freedom is still experienced in the greatest level, in fact, something Voddie Baucham said, who's a pastor in America, grew up in south central Los Angeles, is now in Zambia, heading up a university, he made a statement, I listened to a sermon that he preached a while back and he said black people in America are freer and more prosperous than anywhere else in the world. It's not even close. That's what Voddie Baucham said. He's a black man who lives in Africa now.

Now I say that, it doesn't mean there's not injustice. It doesn't mean there's not things that need to happen and to be changed, and we need to be about doing that but we need to as Christians to put all of these things in perspective and say, "Okay, Lord, it's all about the gospel." Because the ultimate end is Jesus Christ must be made known. But we can love our brothers and sisters by working to advocate for laws that are going to bless them and provide a context for the gospel to go forth freely. Doing that, knowing that we're in an imperfect world, imperfect society, we try to understand, we try to be more and more thoughtful. I know we're all learning each day if we're trying to understand our history, grow in our understanding of the Scriptures, and understanding of even what's happening in politics, but ultimately it's about us reflecting the glory of God because he is the one that we are called to be like, he is the one who has purchased us for himself. We're to live our lives in his presence and it means showing that reverence and godliness so that people can see in us the difference and then we can tell them about Jesus, and we can tell them, "Listen, the reason I oppose same-sex marriage becoming a reality or now that's already done but the reason I oppose children being able to determine their gender identity and change that is because I believe that God makes us what he makes us, and I believe it's the most kind and loving thing I can do to you. People become miserable, sin and living different than God calls us to leads to misery. This is why we all need a Savior.

This is why we need Jesus. You need Jesus like I need Jesus and I found Jesus and I want to share him with you." So it needs to be that kind of loving, we're not to see political differences as making enemies.

I said something the other day, we need to pray for our political opponents, the people on the opposite side. Pray for them and for their salvation and pray for love and compassion that if you could have a conversation with someone you really disagree with and you may hear somebody on tv and you're thinking, "Man, I would just like to have a few words with that person," stop and think, "Lord, am I wanting to have a gospel conversation with that person?" Maybe it starts out with, "I really disagree with your perspective on this and God does too, and one day we're all going to stand before the Lord and I want you to know Christ," and to have hearts that break for people like that. That's what the Lord wants us to be.

So we are to be agents of peace and we can take whatever happens, we can go into next Tuesday, it doesn't matter on Wednesday or whenever we find out the results of the election, what we will know is the Lord has done it and he's go this plan and our message is the same, our ministry is the same, our mission is the same: love God, walk before his face, pursue godliness, become people that other people look to and understand there's something of eternity about us and make known Christ.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for Your truth, for Your word. Lord, we know that we are apart from Your grace we are without hope but because of Your grace, we are filled with joy. We have the blessing of eternal life. We have the blessing of being Your precious children. We have the blessing of knowing that You hold our future, that each day no matter what happens tomorrow in the big picture of our lives or the smallest detail, what happens with our body tomorrow, if we have some challenge that we're going to wake up tomorrow and find out we have something significant to deal with or in a loved one, Lord, whatever that is, we know that You are guiding our steps and not only are You guiding our steps but You're walking with us. You're our shepherd. No matter where we are, You're with us. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort us. So Lord, let Your people, let us shine with joy and hope and glory no matter what happens around us. May people that we know and love who may think like us, may they see the difference that Jesus makes in the way we walk. May people that we know and love who think differently than we do, may they see Jesus in the way that we relate to them, in the way that we walk through life. May we prize Christ to such a degree that people ask a reason for the hope that is within us and may Jesus Christ be praised. That is our desire, Lord. We pray for Your blessing upon our country, for You to do Your will and for, Lord, Your will to be done in our lives and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*