

A Believer's Response to the Political Landscape

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3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Tonight we're going to find ourselves in Ecclesiastes 10 and I don't know if you had the privilege of walking through Ecclesiastes in our Bible reading plan but chapter 10 is a fascinating chapter, particularly in light of the fact that it was inspired by God and written by an individual who served in political office. He was the king of Israel and he gives us insight and commentary on what we know as the politics of life.

I want to begin with some broad statements tonight then we're going to pray because anytime we're going to talk about a believer's response to the political landscape, we're going to need prayer tonight. But allow me to begin with just some introductory remarks. I realize that tonight as a pastor I'm in a no-win situation. No-win. There are many of you tonight whether here in-house or online, when this is over you're going to say that I said too much, and there's another group of you that's going to say I didn't say enough, there's probably not a one of you that's going to say that was just right. So I realize tonight that I am in a no-win situation. That's okay. That means I'm perfectly in line with Amos and Hosea and Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah because all the great prophets were either accused of saying too much or not enough. And so I realize that but just three introductory statements in regards to "the political landscape and/or governance" and the first one is this: in your Bible, in my Bible the only true government system is a theocracy. A theocracy, if you break that word down, means "God is ruling," and so the only time that we truly see government as we would hope to see it is when Jesus Christ himself is seated on his throne. Now that being said, that means that everything that we navigate, every process that we're involved in, every system that we find ourselves in, will always fall short of God's ultimate desire and intentions.

The second introductory statement that I want to make is this: you and I today, at least in this context and culture, I know many of you are watching online from other countries, other continents and such, but the vast majority of our audience tonight here in North America, particularly the United States of America, whether we recognize it or not, you and I live in a rare historical situation, you and I this week have the opportunity and the privilege to do something that very few people have done throughout their lives and that is to actually have a voice in the process. Most cultures if you speak your voice, then you no longer have a voice. Most cultures do not allow you as an individual to give your opinion on who is in charge, in fact, most countries, most sovereign states, most political

entities run by what we know as the golden rule, whoever has the most gold is ruling at the time. And so that is, so what we are walking through is actually a historical as well as a current rarity.

Third general statement: no matter what system that we find ourselves in, whether it is a totalitarian state, a fascist state, a democratic state, and fill in the blank for all the political science majors of the types that you can have out there, according to Romans 13, all of those "state of political affairs" are ordained by God. We live in a world today where every type of governmental system is at use at some place in the world and according to Romans 13, it's not just here in the United States that it's ordained by God. They are all ordained by God which means that here, and this is the conclusion of my general statements and then we're going to pray because we need it, if you and I live in a place where our leaders are elected by our choosing and all authority is given by God, then it naturally tells us that God gives us those in leadership that reflect our heart toward him. Now that'll change things of the political landscape. In other words, whomever the Lord so allows to be in leadership in a representative context such as ours, the Lord is allowing our hearts, our ambitions, our desires to be on public display. And so unlike the Apostle Paul who lived in the days of Nero where the Christians were being burned at the stake for their faithfulness, you and I take that which we believe and that which we hold dear and it is put on the public stage as a mirror representation of who we are.

So those are the general comments of the political landscape before we dig into Ecclesiastes 10. I'm going to pray for us and then we're going to dive into Scripture.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you tonight that, at least from my perspective, of all the systems that we could live in, God, thank you that we live in the one that we do. God, we ask for forgiveness in advance, Lord, not an indulgence but just a recognition that we as individuals are sinful people, we as a culture are sinful people, God, our leaders are sinful people, all of us are sinful people. Help us, O God, help us to subject ourselves to you. We confess in advance that we rarely do so. God, help us tonight to be more biblical than we are political, help us to be more in alignment with your word than we are a particular party, help us tonight to be more interested in how you see things than in how a certain policy, person, or procedure will benefit us respectively. Help us, O God, tonight just to see with your eyes and hear with your words. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Well, tonight Ecclesiastes 10. I'm going to read the entirety of it and you may notice on the outline, for those of you in-house that's on the screen, those of you watching online will be at the bottom, you'll notice that it's in somewhat of an unusual form, in fact, allow me to share with you in the beginning many of the Old Testament passages, particularly the wisdom literature, Job and Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, align themselves in what we call a chiastic or a chiasm format. In other words, the first principle and the last principle are reflective of each other, the second and the second to last, the third to the third to last respectively. Here in Ecclesiastes 10, we actually have seven different divisions and it's going to be that middle division that is the most significant one, and the first three are going to build up to it, and then the last three are

going to come as a reflection thereof but you're going to see a complement of these respectively. So let's read the entirety of Ecclesiastes 10 and then we'll get to these seven points. It says,

1 Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour. 2 A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left. 3 Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool. 4 If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences. 5 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler: 6 Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. 7 I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth. 8 He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. 9 Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. 10 If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct. 11 Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better. 12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. 14 A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? 15 The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city. 16 Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! 17 Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness! 18 By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through. 19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things. 20 Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

Let me remind you that the individual who the Lord gave these words to us through was the child of a king and he was the king, and he would one day be the father of two kings, both Rehoboam and Jeroboam, who served both the northern and the southern kingdoms respectively.

So tonight as we talk about how do we navigate the political landscape in light of the fact that we do not live in a theocracy, in light of the fact that we live in a political system that is historically and currently very rare, and in light of the fact that because we have input in the process, that oftentimes our representatives and those that lead us are actually a reflection of who we truly are?

The first thing I want to share with you tonight is when it comes to the political landscape: do not throw stones. Notice in the first three verses it talks about the heart of a fool, the action of a fool, that everybody will know that he is one. One of the biggest struggles, one of the biggest issues, at least one of the observations that I have made when it comes to the political activity of our land is that we have a natural propensity to defend an action or a behavior of our said candidate but we bemoan it when it exists in the opposite candidate. In other words, we defend it when it's on our side, we bemoan it when it's the other side. According to verses 1 through 3, that is the behavior of a fool when we condone because he's ours or she is ours and we condemn because he or she is theirs.

Let me remind you in Matthew 7, Jesus made this very famous statement. By the way, I'm going to cite the first few words and then I'm going to push pause, "Do not judge." Now our culture today has said that because Jesus said that we cannot make judgments about lifestyles, decisions, celebrations, whatever it may be. But Jesus continued, he said, "Do not judge for with what mete you make judgment, you shall be judged therewith." Here's what Jesus was saying, "Don't be a hypocrite. If it's right for your side, then it's right for the other. If it's wrong for yours, then it is wrong for the other's." The problem is because we are sinful people, it's right if it's our side and if it's wrong, it's yours. What happens there is we all end up being fools because we defend a party, we defend a system, we defend this side of the aisle and we do not defend that which is "righteousness" in the eyes of God. It is a fool who says it's okay because it's my candidate and it's not because it's yours. That is the mark of a fool. Do not throw stones because oftentimes in the political landscape it will be your own very windows that will be crashing down.

The second thing is this: whether you and I like it or not, and this is completely contrary to our flesh and our nature, we are called to submit to authority. Now let's just confess tonight none of us like to submit. We don't like to put ourselves in subject to anybody else. We all love to be armchair quarterbacks, do we not? I'll just go ahead and go there because we live in the South, "If I were the coach..." how many times have you said that before? Well, guess what? We're not. We are called to submit to authority. As I stated earlier in Romans 13, it makes it very clear that whatever the positions are, whatever the authorities are, they are allowed and they are ordained by God.

But I want to call your attention to verses 5, 6, and 7 in chapter 10 because these are oftentimes the excuses that I've heard of well-meaning Christians to "rebel" against authority. Verse 5, "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler." I've heard people say, "Well, we must rebel against because it's a bad or a wrong policy." Well, that's not what the Scripture says. The Scripture says that happens because our leaders are sinful, the subjects are sinful, we live in a fallen world. Verse 26, "Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place." Sometimes we find ourselves, we've got people in the wrong positions. Verse 7, "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth." And sometimes, no matter what the position is, we've got the wrong people. And so I've heard people say, "Well, we've got the wrong policy, we've got the wrong positions, we've got the wrong people,

so we must rebel against." Let me remind you when the Apostle Paul wrote those words in Romans 13 Nero was the ruler. It was his way or it wasn't even the highway, it was the deathway is what it was. He was the wrong person, he was in the wrong position and he instituted wrong laws and Paul said we submit to him anyway.

One of the problems is we want our President and our elected officials to be Jesus Christ on the throne and I've got news for you: until Jesus Christ comes back, we do not have a theocracy. We're going to have wrong policies. We're going to have wrong positions. And we're going to have wrong people because we have sinful people who are being elected to rule over us. And so just because we have wrong "stuff" happening does not give us the biblical excuse that we're just going to "rebel and I don't have to do this, and I don't have to do that," because I've got news for you: it doesn't matter who occupies the office, it doesn't matter which side tends to have the majority, at least in our culture and in our context, we are always going to be subject to wrong policies, wrong positions and wrong people because we have sinful people who are leading sinful people. If we want everything to be right, then we'd better be saved because we've got to come back with Jesus when he reigns. That's just the way that it is.

The third thing which may be the most controversial, maybe not: we are to pray as believers for a quiet and peaceable life. Verses 8 through 10, it gives us a warning, "He that digs a pit shall fall into it; and he that breaks an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Whoever removes stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaves wood shall be endangered thereby." Let me walk through these analogies real quickly with you then we're going to go back to what 1 Timothy 2 says.

Beware of formulating or creating "your own consequences." Here's what I mean by that. In verse 8, "He that digs a pit shall fall in it." Do you not remember a man in the Old Testament by the name of Haman? Haman in the book of Esther hated the Jews, despised the Jews, so what did he do? He built a device to end their life that his own life was ended thereupon, and one of the problems is we oftentimes create a context to "trap" those that are in opposition that we end up being subject to the same rules and regulations. It says whoever digs the pit, be careful, you may be the one that falls in it.

Secondly, beware according to verse 9 of moving the lines. One of the great authors of days gone by was a man by the name of G. K. Chesterton. He wrote a book that's been very well read through the years called "Orthodoxy," how do we view a Christian life in an orthodox or a proper perspective. He makes one of the most profound statements that I've ever heard. He said, "Before you move a man's fence, ask him first why he put it up." It's a great thing to ask, is it not? We just assume, "Well, that's the wrong thing. Move it." And we have to ask ourselves why was it originally put there in the first place. It says in verse 9, it says whoever removes the stones shall be hurt therewith. It's possible that originally the fence was put up to keep people from falling in. So we move the fence because we think it's a better decision and who ends up falling in? The people who moved the very fence.

Then be careful that that which we "put in place" to bite others, bites ourselves. You've heard me say this before and I'll say it again, the Bible says that we're to pray for a quiet and peaceable life. Nowhere do you find in Scripture for us as believers to pray that we'll be in charge calling the shots. It's just not there. It sounds good and it's appealing to the flesh but according to 1 Timothy 2 it says that we're to pray for all those that are in power and authority, especially the kings, that we might live a quiet and peaceable life. Rarely have I observed people who try to "move fences and move stones" so that they might live a quiet and peaceable life, typically it's because it will benefit them and prosper them if the lines are changed.

We are called to live a quiet and peaceable life. Now this is going to run contrary to our flesh but as a believer in Jesus Christ, what the Bible is calling us to do not only here in Ecclesiastes but in 1 Timothy 2, it's calling us to pray, "God, put those in leadership over us that will simply just allow us to live our faith without opposition." There is no call to power. There is no call to authority. There is call to a quiet and peaceable life. Let me put that in simple terminology: you and I have a distinct privilege this week that very few people on planet earth do, we have the opportunity to say, "I believe that this person in this position will lead us better." There's really only one question you have to ask and it has nothing to do with political party. The question you have to ask is: which one of these individuals do I believe will allow me to pray, read my Bible, and to worship publicly to the greatest of my ability? That's it. That's the metric. You say, "Well, that doesn't line up with the commercials I've been watching." I understand but rarely do those commercials line up with Scripture.

The fourth statement and the most important one. Remember, the first three lead to the center statement, the latter three come out of it. It's verse 10, "If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct." Now get ready, I'm going to hunker in here for just a little bit. The fourth thing when it comes to this issue is you need to stay sharp. You need to stay sharp and that has nothing to do with politics, that has to do with your relationship with the Lord, and particularly that has to do with your relationship to his instruction manual, what we commonly refer to as the Bible.

If the blade, if the iron is blunt, then it takes more work. There are a thousand different illustrations that we could use to illustrate this but you do know that the most dangerous knife in the world is a dull one. Why? Because you will exercise more pressure, you will put more power, and if it does not do what it's supposed to do, it will inflict the most harm on you. I have rarely been hurt by a sharp knife, I've been hurt a lot of times by a dull knife because I exercised too much power, too much exertion, and because of the pressure it would slip because it was designed to cut and it was not cutting. I don't know if you've ever experienced this, it's just the foolishness of days gone by. I've had times where I have run a chainsaw to where it was to the point that it was not cutting through a tree, it was burning through a tree. Why? Because I was either, A. too lazy, too tired or too poor to go sharpen the blade and I just said, "I'll just burn this thing down." Well, according to what we just read, if the blade is not sharp, it actually takes more work. It's more difficult. It's harder to cut a tomato. It's harder to cut down a tree. A thousand

different illustrations but let's talk about this in particular to our spiritual lives because I think sometimes our frustration with the political landscape is not necessarily because the ills of our culture as much as it is our own dullness of faith. Why is it that a knife can become dull? What causes a kitchen knife, what causes a chainsaw and everything in between, what causes it to go dull? Because when our knife or our blade is dull, then it's actually harder to accomplish the task.

There are four ways that a knife can go dull. The first one is a lack of routine maintenance. If you do not regularly sharpen a knife, it will go dull. Plain and simple. In fact, we've seen a lot of proverbial statements in regards to this. Billy Graham probably had the best statement. Someone came to him years ago back in the 1950s and said, "Brother Graham, if you knew Jesus Christ was coming back in three years, what would you do?" He said, "I would study for two and preach for one." He recognized that the blade must be sharp and the sharper the blade the better the cutting, but if we do not stop to maintain the blade, if we do not take regular times to sharpen it, we will have to use more energy and we will actually get less done. Now I don't know about you but in light of the topic of the night, does it seem like we spend a whole lot of energy in words and get nothing done? Just an observation.

The second way that a knife blade goes dull, and this is going to relate to the subject matter at hand, it gets dirty. It gets polluted. Have you ever pulled a knife out, now this is particularly in the outdoor environment, hopefully it's not your kitchen, and you pull that knife, that ax blade, whatever it may be, and it's all rusty? It's got all the contaminants on it? Or maybe you left it outside in the night, or maybe it had dirt on it that you either, A. were to lazy to clean off, or B. you didn't know was there and over time it begins to build up? And when it is dirty, it cannot operate the way that it was designed to operate. Not only do you have to sharpen a knife, you have to clean a knife because the impediments therein will keep it from doing what it was designed to do. I don't have to get into the dirtiness of the political landscape, do I? But I think we can all agree that all sides need a good cleaning, do they not?

Third, you dull a blade when you hit impediments in the way that were designed to be there. You knick the blade. In other words, if you are cutting some type of device and you hit an obstruction or you hit something you'd not planned you, you knick the blade, you bend the blade. Those of you who like to watch the show "Forged in Fire," I know I have a home with three boys so we watch that show, one of the things that they do with these blades that are designed is actually give them a strength test where they hit them against an immovable object to see if the blade will stay true. If we hit something that has no business being there, at times it can dull our blade.

And fourth and last, a simple lack of use. Anybody ever inherited a knife? I have. I inherited my grandfather's knives, pocketknives. You get that old pocketknife out of a footlocker that's been in there for decades and it won't cut a piece of paper. Why? Because over time the natural processes erode it to the point where it's unable to do its function.

Now I want you to think about this in terms of our faith. If we do not have a regular maintenance of our faith, if we have things that have no business being a part of our lives, the dirtiness of our faith, if we're always hitting obstructions in our faith, or we never utilize our faith, we're going to be dull in our faith, are we not? Let's apply it to Scripture. If we don't regularly utilize Scripture, by the way, you do know the Bible's called in Hebrews 4 sharper than any two-edged sword or knife? If we don't regularly utilize Scripture, if we allow Scripture to get dirty. You say, "Well, how do you allow Scripture to get dirty?" You allow things outside of Scripture to cover and taint it and to cloud it. Or you hit stuff with Scripture. You say, "How can you hit stuff with Scripture?" You can go places it was never designed to go, is how you hit things. Or you simply just don't use it.

You see, I think what's fascinating about Ecclesiastes 10, this is a political treatise. It's about rulers. It's about subjects. It's about being in authority and yet the centerpiece has nothing to do with who's in office, the centerpiece has nothing to do with who the king is, the centerpiece is you as the subject, how are you with God? That's what makes all the difference in the world and here it says in verse 10 and I'm going to speak this personally, "If your blade is dull, then you're going to have to work harder. If your blade is sharp, then you can exercise your faith as you so desire." I think one of the problems and I'm just going to go there because I can, is we have a lot of people of faith that are upset about the political landscape because they spend more time watching the news than they do reading the Bible. They spend more time watching political ads than they do a Bible study. And do you know what that does? It dulls your blade and you have to work harder because according to what we just read, we're to pray for those who are in authority, and if you've read Proverbs, it says that God turns the king's heart. Oftentimes we try to turn it with our own endeavors and/or authority.

A fifth point here verses 12 through 17 which, by the way, is reflective, if you'll notice the chiasm, of praying that we will live a quiet and peaceable life. This is hard for Baptists: keep your tongue. You know, the book of Proverbs says you have one tongue and two ears for a reason. It doesn't really say it that way but that's the New Revised Jeff version of what it says. Keep your tongue. Beginning in verse 12, it talks about the words of a wise man versus the words of a fool. Verse 14 and 15 says, "A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? The labour of the foolish wearith every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city." The more words we use, the message simply just gets lost. In other words, the more we chatter, the more we speak to, the more we address, the more we realize that no one is actually even paying attention to what we're saying.

I remember days gone by and I'm sure you do as well, there was a commercial for an investing firm, E. F. Hutton. Remember E. F. Hutton? When E. F. Hutton speaks, you remember the tagline? People listen. Why? Because it was I guess hedging on the fact that people who don't speak a whole lot, when they do pay attention to it. It's worth hearing. I'm just going to speak real quickly about social media for a moment. I know none of you would ever divulge into that travesty but just pretend that you would. Those who post the most, get read the least. If all you're doing is putting out whatever you think

about every subject matter, nobody cares. I'll be honest, when I do get on social media do you know what I read? I read people who don't post much because they might have something to say. There's an old adage when it comes to public speaking, there's a difference between having something to say and just having to say something. Have you ever thought about that? You know, I hate to glean wisdom from him but sometimes we might want to listen to old Forrest Gump. Remember what Forrest said? "I just don't have much to say about that." There's a lot of wisdom in that, is there not?

Oftentimes according to verse 16, our proactivity can actually backfire on us. It says, "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!" Now if you were to unpack that verse specifically, one of the things you'll discover particularly about princes is they were to be members of warfare and they would go into the battle having not eaten so that they would battle harder and then they would come eat at night. Woe when the princes are eating in the morning. In other words, they've got things backwards, so to speak.

Proactivity, when we go before the cause, oftentimes the cause will bite us in the end. Allow me to give you an illustration that many of you may or may not be familiar with but was actually the subject matter of my Master's thesis in Baptist history. I'm sure we're all familiar with what we know as the Scopes Monkey Trial. The Scopes Monkey Trial was that famous trial in Dayton, Tennessee that pitted what we know as scientific evolution versus biblical creationism, and there in the great state of Tennessee, most people don't realize this but it was actually rendered a mistrial. There was actually no verdict that was given but thanks to the academic world and the media, the scientific community won the case even though actually nobody actually won the case but that's a whole other lesson for another day. A lot of people don't even know why that case even went to trial. Allow me to share with you the "backstory" of the Scopes Monkey Trial. There was a state representative in the great state of Tennessee who had been serving for many many years in the state legislation who had a granddaughter who was attending the university of Tennessee. Volunteers up there, of course, and she was a student and she would come home as they would do in those days oftentimes just at the Christmas break. In fact, a lot of people don't realize one of the reasons among many that in those days people had an affinity for fraternities and sororities and such is because they had a family away from home. They would go to school oftentimes in the fall and some of them would not return again until the summer harvesting season. They were just gone the entire time.

Well, she made her way back. It was the Christmas season. She was a freshman at the University of Tennessee. She brought back with her the student manual for the University of Tennessee and her granddad, the state representative of Tennessee, started thumbing through it over the Christmas...he wanted to know as a state legislator what the funds that he had authority over were supporting or not supporting and he discovered something much to his demise there in that manual, that according to the official manual of the University of Tennessee if you were a professor in the sciences you had the opportunity that you could either teach from the perspective of Darwinian evolution or you could teach from biblical creationism. The choice was yours. You had the opportunity to teach as you feel it. Sounds like academia, does it not? Unlike today where they're mandated

what you can and you can't teach, the choice is yours. It's your classroom, it's your curriculum, you do what you want to do. This state representative was incensed, "How dare we give people the opportunity to teach evolution. They should be teaching biblical creationism." And so he began the process of putting in legislation that made it illegal in the state of Tennessee to teach Darwinian evolution. That legislation made its way all the way to the top and the Scopes Monkey Trial was the byproduct thereof.

Allow me to allow you to guess how many professors at the University of Tennessee in those days actually Darwinian evolution? Zero. What did we do? We picked a fight that wasn't even a fight. Oftentimes our proactive policies to prevent that which we're scared of just leads to the solidification of that which are contrary to. If I could put that in good old Southernese: don't poke the bear.

Last but not least under this one in verse 17, "Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!" Self-control leads to the self-control of those that are around us. Keep your tongue. One of the problems that we have as believers is letting God be God. We want to do his job for him. "God, do you not see what they're doing? God, do you not hear what they're saying? God, do you not see this?" And so we say, "Well, God, if you're not going to do it, I will. God, if you're not going to say something, I'm going to." You know, we talk about don't get behind God but sometimes we have the problem of getting ahead of him and God knows what he's doing and he has his time-scale and at times just like Haman, he has people "hang themselves."

You know, I can't help the fact and I guess I apologize for it, being from Texas, you know, there's some strange laws in Texas. I don't know if you know that but there are. One of the laws that is still on the books is that you're not allowed to hang a man with more than seven knots in the rope. You may not have known that. You say, "Why is that?" Let me give you a little just interesting lesson on hanging folks. Y'all ready for this one? This is what, I took Texas history, okay, I had to learn this stuff. Did you know that the fewer the knots in the rope, the quicker the death. In other words, if you were to have a hanging noose with one knot, it would almost just kill you instantly. The more knots you have, the tension on the rope lessens and it's more painful and the exasperation kicks in, and it was deemed years ago unfit punishment to have a man hang by a rope with more than seven knots. If you choose to make somebody else's life as miserable as possible, then you will hang by the same rope that you construct. Sometimes we just need to keep our mouth shut and people will hang themselves, the problem is we construct a rope, don't we, and we end up hanging ourselves on the rope that we constructed for others.

Toward the end of this passage, verses 18 and 19: be diligent for righteousness. It says, "By much slothfulness the building decays; and through idleness of the hands the house drops through. A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry: but money answereth all things." I mentioned that kind of the structure of this chapter is in a chiasm and you see the points that are reflective of each other. If you'll kind of go back, those of you who can see on the screen, when we're called to submit to authority we talked about the wrong

policy, the wrong positions, the wrong people, what is the right policy as a believer? What is the right policy for life? Diligence and hard work. That's what the right policy is, not to be slothful, not to be idle. What is the right position? Looking at it as a long-term win rather than a short-term pleasure. Rarely if ever does God get in a hurry. In fact, one of my favorite verses in Proverbs says, "He who makes haste with his feet is quick to fall into sin." I can't speak for you personally but I'll speak to myself. I've gotten in more trouble in life because I've gone too fast rather than I've gone too slow. Rarely does God have to say, "Come on, Jeff." Oftentimes God has to say, "Whoa boy! Whoa!" The long-term win over the short-term pleasure. What about the right people? Those who do not fall for such things. The greatest artist, the greatest musicians, the greatest actors, the greatest writers are rarely rewarded for their skills while they're still alive. Have you noticed that? The paintings that fetch millions of dollars, the manuscripts that win awards are oftentimes the work of those that have already passed away. Rarely if ever does the short-term here and now reward, it's those who are thinking, writing and displaying their skills for years down the road.

In today's political landscape, rarely is righteousness the here and the now. Allow me to give you a little Jeffism: everybody wants to talk about the next five years, nobody wants to talk about the next five decades. What can solve right now? What can fix right now? Well, let me tell you, in my home and I am not a builder, I'm not a building science guy, but there are times that my house breaks. It's just part of life, it's because we live in a fallen world. There's a difference between the way I fix it and the way a professional fixes it. What do I do? I just stop the leak, that's what I do. You'd be shocked what I can use to fix a toilet until I call a plumber. You'd be amazed what I can do to keep rain from coming in until I call a roofer. All I'm doing is Band-Aiding in the immediate but the problem is we've become a culture of Band-Aids. We put Band-Aids upon Band-Aids upon Band-Aids. Sometimes you need a new roof and sometimes you need a new septic system. In other words, the right policy, the position, the people are rarely the immediate quick fix but everybody wants it now.

Last but not least, verse 20: do not curse the king. Oo, that'll preach on both sides and all sides. By the way, can I remind you that this reflects the first one, don't cast stones. Isn't it funny oftentimes it was okay to curse the previous leader but not the current one. Isn't it funny how that works? If it's our guy, it's okay. If it's theirs it's not, and vice versa. "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter." You know, whom we know in the Bible as the devil, Satan, the dragon, he has a lot of different names, he has a lot of different descriptions. One of the descriptions in the Bible is he's the prince of the power of the air. In other words, what verse 20 is saying, there's some incredible spiritual insight here. He's saying be careful what you say because a little bird will communicate it. How many times after somebody said, "Well, how did you know that?" A little birdie told me. Y'all know that little phrase, right, a little birdie? What that really means is gossip but that's a whole other story. How did you know? A little bird told me.

Tonight, I want to share a story with you that has absolutely nothing to do with the political landscape but can relate to it, I promise you. This is a story that I know that I have shared before, particularly on Wednesday nights, but there are just some stories that we need to hear again, in my opinion. It's the story of a friend of mine who was very high up in a particular business that was a business of innovation. In other words, the first person or the first company to produce the product wins and everybody else is in last place. If you weren't first to the show, then you were last. You had to get there before everybody. It was a very high-stress, competitive field of production and this company that he worked with or worked for, he was very high up, they had a competitor in another state that always seemed to beat them to the punch, just always seemed to get to the convention before they did, or get to the product line before they did. It just always seemed to happen that way. The owner of the company was convinced, convinced that they had a mole. There was somebody on the inside who was sharing secret information. So he had everybody sign documents, he had everybody locked down, they put passwords on everything and they still kept getting beat by their competitor.

He was convinced now that the competitor was spying on them. Somehow it couldn't really be happening, they must be cheating. So he decided that for their next product line, they would go to a remote island in the Caribbean that did not have the technology of the day, didn't have the internet, didn't have the cellphone towers and such. It was one of those things where they would go and discuss, they would memorize the information, they wouldn't write anything down so that way they knew that there's no way it could be transmitted to the competitor in advance.

They went to the annual convention that year and guess what? They got beat again. So this man decided to eat the proverbial humble pie. He went to the CEO of this other company and he said, "Sir, I must confess I have thought ill of you, I've accused you of cheating, I've accused you of spying, I've accused you of putting moles within my company but you're just better than we are. You're smarter than we are. You're better. You win, we lose. How do you do it? How are you so good?" This other CEO who, by the way, happened to be located in the state of Utah, said, "I have no idea what you're talking about." He said, "When we go into our annual planning meetings, we bring the Mormon prophets in and they tell us what to do." I think if you have an honest orthodox look at the Mormon faith, you would claim that it is of the enemy, the prince of the power of the air.

The enemy will take words you speak in your bedchamber and will communicate them on the billboards of life. The enemy will take that which you gripe about in your home and expose you at your annual evaluation and you're wondering to yourself, "How did they know? I only spoke that in the house. Is somebody spying?" No. What does it say here? The bird of the air will carry the voice. In light of the political landscape, no matter what your decision for whomever you decide for this week, can I encourage you to do several things no matter who wins the least of which is don't speak ill of that person publicly or privately because according to verse 20 of Ecclesiastes 10, that's not your job. Your job is to pray for that person. Based on however you select this week, there may be one you pray for less than another. That's fine. But either one, you are to pray.

At the end of the day, let me repeat the introduction: the only true God-stamped government is a theocracy and it will not exist until Jesus Christ returns. What we will participate in this week is a rarity in history and in the current societies of which we live. And third, God ordains all authority so whom is or becomes our leaders may be a scathing spiritual mirror of our own personal spirituality which means that you and I better get to praying because that's what Ecclesiastes 10 challenges us to do. Much like this morning when Solomon said to the books there are many and studying is a weariness of flesh, you'll never hear me say don't participate, you'll never hear me say don't be a part of the process, he challenged his family, he challenged the country to read and to study but just to put God first. Can I challenge you tonight just put it in perspective, that it's never going to be what you want it to be until Jesus comes back and what it is and/or becomes may be a reflection of who we are and who we've become, and maybe we ought to take it as a personal spiritual mirror more than a reason to throw stones at the glass of whoever they may be. At the end of the day as a believer in Jesus Christ, I just want to be able to exercise my faith as God has called me to whoever happens to occupy the offices, plural, of this land and that will be my prayer on Tuesday when I go into that booth, "God, may this person allow me to worship you unashamedly, unabashedly with complete freedom." And that, my friends, is the guide to the political landscape.