

POLITICS AND HOPE

- A. Introduction: We're talking about knowing the hope inspired by God's call. He has called or invited every human being to become His son or daughter through faith in Christ. God's purpose is to live with His family on this earth forever. Eph 1:18; Eph 1:4,5; Isa 45:18; Rev 21:3
1. Both the human race and the earth have been damaged by sin. Because of Adam's sin there is a curse of corruption and death in God's creation.
    - a. To remedy this condition and accomplish His purpose, God is working out His plan of redemption, His plan to deliver both the human race and the home He made for us from sin and its effects.
      1. Jesus came to earth and went to the Cross to pay for sin. Now, all who believe on Jesus and bow their knee to Him as Savior and Lord can be transformed from sinners into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God through the new birth. I John 5:1; John 1:12,13
      2. Jesus will soon come again to cleanse the earth of every trace of corruption and death and transform it into a fit forever home for God's family. Isa 65:17; II Pet 3:10-13
    - b. Part of the hope inspired by God's call comes from knowing the future of this world. If all you know is the current state of affairs, it's very bleak. But if you understand that God's good plan of redemption is in process, you have a part in it, and it will be completed, it will help you keep a perspective that gives you an expectation of coming good.
      1. The Bible is clear that the years leading up to Jesus' return will be increasingly chaotic. We'll see increasing unrighteousness, immorality, injustice and lawlessness all around us. It's easy to get caught up in the emotions produced by what we see.
      2. We need to learn to keep our focus on the big picture. Jesus is coming to make things right as He establishes the visible kingdom of God on earth. This life is only a tiny part of our existence. The better and greater part is ahead, first in Heaven and then on earth made new.
    - c. The most important thing is not that we fix society. It can't be fixed because the root problem is spiritual (sin). It must be transformed by the supernatural power of God. The most important thing is that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus so they can have a part in God's plan.
  2. If you don't learn to look at unfolding events in terms of the big picture you'll be full of fear and anxiety and get caught up in the discord and strife that is abounding in our country and the world.
    - a. Just days before Jesus was crucified His disciples asked Him what sign would indicate His return is near. Matt 24:3--Tell us, when will this take place, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end—that is, the completion and consummation—of the age? (Amp)
      1. Notice first of all that the disciples understood that the coming of the Lord won't mean the end of the world. It means the ending of one age and the beginning of another.
      2. Jesus gave a long answer (subject for another day). But note that He compared the increasingly difficult times leading up to His return to birth pangs, revealing that certain things will happen more frequently and be more intense as His return nears. Matt 24:6-8
        - A. "Sorrows" in the Greek language is the word ODIN. It's used for the pain of childbirth. v8--with all these the birth pangs of the new age begin. (NEB)
        - B. Birth pangs or labor pains start out light and far apart but get more intense and closer together as the birth nears. Understanding what is happening along with awareness of the end result enables the woman to go through the process.
    - b. Consider several thoughts in connection with our present discussion. Jesus said that before He comes nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. He isn't referring to England fighting France. This is a reference to people groups fighting people groups.
      1. Kingdom refers to people in a kingdom under a kingly rule or a political unit. Nation is the word ETHNOS. It means multitude, people, race belonging or living together. It's possible to have several nations or groups of people (ETHNOS) in one kingdom.
      2. Discord between people groups has been a problem since the earliest generations of men.

But, according to Jesus, such conflicts will increase before He returns.

- c. We have to be wise to it and see that we don't get caught up in it ourselves. I'm hearing more and more accounts of Christians fighting with Christians over the political, social, economic and racial issues in our country. That ought not be.

B. As Christians our first obligation is to Almighty God. Before we get into conflict with either an unbeliever or a brother or sister in the Lord we need to look at what God's Word says about human interaction.

1. We're instructed to live at peace with each other and avoid strife. Strife is bitter or intense, sometimes violent, conflict or disagreement in opinion. Look at a few of the many verses on this subject.

- a. There were divisions and strife among the believers in the church at Corinth. There were a number of issues that fed into it (lessons for another day). But it expressed itself in breaking into little groups who aligned themselves with various ministers. I Cor 1:11-13

1. Paul rebuked them for acting like unbelievers. I Cor 3:3--For as long as [there are] envying and jealousy and wrangling and factions among you, are you not unspiritual and of the flesh, behaving yourselves after a human standard and like mere (unchanged) men? (Amp)

2. Paul reminded them that we're one in Christ. We have a bond of unity that supersedes disagreements. It's okay to prefer Paul's ministry to Peter's but it can't lead to strife or exalting yourself over your brother in Christ or denigrating your sister in Christ. We'll say more about that in a moment.

- b. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (Rom 12:18, Amp). Live in peace (II Cor 13:11, Amp); Be at peace among yourselves (I Thess 5:13, Amp). The servant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome—fighting and contending (II Tim 2:24, Amp).

1. This doesn't mean pretend that there are no issues or areas of disagreement. Nor does it mean you shouldn't work out conflict. Much of how that occurs depends on the nature of your relationship with the other person (lessons for another day).

2. But the point for our discussion is that we have to learn to agree to disagree about many things in this life because we all see things differently and that's okay. But we can't let it bring us to the point of disparaging our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We're the Body of Christ.

2. The Bible allows for disagreement in non-moral areas or areas where there are no prohibitions or admonitions in scripture. Let's clearly define moral. Something is morally wrong if God says don't do it and you do it or if God says don't do it and you do.

- a. In the first century church there were disagreements over dietary issues and celebrating certain feast days. This is an entire lesson for another day, but several thoughts give us insight.

1. There were many reasons for these disagreements based on upbringing as well as differing levels of knowledge. Jewish converts raised with the Law of Moses brought the practice of dietary restrictions with them when they came to Christ. Gentiles had no such prohibitions.

2. Rome introduced meat markets to Israel. Some of the meat was from animals considered unclean under the Law and some was offered in sacrifice to idols when slaughtered. The Jewish leadership forbade Jews from eating at the shambles (meat markets). But Paul taught that no food is unclean if it is received with thanksgiving to Almighty God our Creator.

- b. These differing opinions led to conflict and Paul addressed it in several epistles. Rom 14:1-23 is a long discussion of differing views in regard to these non-moral issues. Note these points:

1. v3--The man who will eat anything must not look down on the man who abstains from some things, and the man who abstains from them must not criticize the one who does not, for God has accepted him. (Goodspeed)

2. v4-18--Paul admonishes believers: Who are you to condemn another man's servant. He's God's servant and will ultimately answer to Him. The Lord is well able to deal with him.

Make sure your conscience is clear in what you allow yourself to do.

3. v19--So let us then eagerly pursue what makes for mutual up building (edification and

development) of one another. (Amp)

3. Matt 22:37-40--As Christians we're first and foremost under God's Law of Love. All of God's Law is summed up in this statement: Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself.
  - a. Note this point. It's possible to *love* someone and not *like* or *agree* with them. *Like* comes out of compatible personalities, similar interests, etc. *Agreement* comes out of similar viewpoints. If you are very dissimilar from someone you may not like them. And that's okay.
  - b. Matt 7:12--Jesus defined the love we're to show others this way: Treat others as you want to be treated. How do you want to be treated when your opinion is different than the other guy? Like a stupid idiot? Like a reprobate? Or as someone who believes he has good reason for his opinion?
    1. You don't have to agree with opposing viewpoints. In fact, you can strongly and completely disagree. But you can't assess, talk about or treat people as stupid idiots based on their political, social, economic or racial opinions.
    2. I Cor 13:7--Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person (Amp). We need to presume the guy thinks he's got a good reason for believing as he does. If you had his life experience, possibly you'd see things as he does.
  - c. Our political, social, economic and racial views come out of our life experiences and the information we've been exposed to through out our life. That's normal. For example:
    1. If you were born into a household where every adult was an active union member and grew up hearing how necessary and beneficial unions are, along with hearing that anyone who opposes unions is an enemy of the working man, this would likely be your view of reality as an adult.
    2. If you grew up in a non-union home exposed to small, independent business men for whom right-to-work (union free workplace) was a necessity, hearing that unions protect incompetent workers while the leadership advances its own political agenda, this would be your viewpoint.
4. We must keep the right perspective and remember what's most important. With an unbeliever, it's that they come to saving knowledge of Jesus. With a believer, it's that we edify or build one another up into the image of Christ. This matters more than persuading them to see politics the way you do.
  - a. I'm not saying you can't be concerned that certain viewpoints are potentially harmful to our country. But you must recognize the difference between temporal and eternal issues. Who wins the election is a temporary issue. Where people spend eternity is an eternal issue.
  - b. Gal 5:19,20--We must also recognize that strife comes naturally to fallen flesh. The word translated strife in this verse has the idea of selfish strife. It's easy to get focused on: I've got to make them see my point of view because I'm right. And then we lose our eternal perspective.
5. Adding to all the current political and social discord is the fact that in Christian circles some people try to hijack the Bible to support their particular non-moral, temporal point of view.
  - a. On the one hand there are those who say it's a sin to vote while others say it's a sin not to vote. Both are wrong. Voting is not a religious or moral duty. It's a civic duty. Voting such as we do in America is a modern development. The Bible doesn't address it
  - b. Then there are those who say that voting for a certain candidate is a sin. That's also incorrect.
    1. Who you vote for comes out of your life experience and the information you've had access to. Based on those factors you have an opinion about what political, economic, and social policies and philosophies would be most beneficial for the county and which would be wrong (not in a moral sense) but in terms of effect on the country.
    2. It's okay for two Christians who love the Lord and are fully committed to Him to have very different political and social viewpoints. It's even okay to be amazed (in a not good way) that your brother in Christ holds that viewpoint. But don't divide over non-moral, temporal issues.
  - c. We're electing a president not a pastor. If your conscience permits you to vote for a particular candidate and mine does not, we both have to give each other grace and remember the big picture.
- C. Much of the current anxiety people are feeling comes from the fear that if "their" candidate gets elected it will be the end of society as we know it. We'll discuss this in more detail in the next lesson. But consider

several thoughts as we close.

1. The fear of something is always worse than the thing itself because the anxiety lasts as long as it takes to get to the event you're dreading. And during the entire waiting period you experience torment.

a. When the dreaded event occurs you deal with it and that sense of dread stops. Even if you're beaten to death, it stops. Even if you become homeless and starve to death in a box in an alley, it comes to an end. In terms of eternity, a few weeks, months or years of suffering is nothing.

Rom 8:18; II Cor 4:17,18

b. I'm not trying to be cavalier in what I'm saying. I'm making the point that we have to learn to put everything in perspective. That's one way we deal with fear and anxiety.

1. Whatever effect the outcome of this election has on everyday life, we'll adjust to it and deal with it like millions of people have done with political upheaval down through the centuries.

2. The Bible is clear that the normal activities of life will continue right up to the return of Jesus. People will eat and drink, marry, buy and sell, plant and build. Luke 17:26-30

2. Matt 6:34--Worry is speculation about what the future holds. Jesus said: Don't borrow tomorrow's troubles. You've got enough to deal with today.

a. Matt 6:25-33--Jesus told us that we deal with worry by focusing our attention on God's character and actions. He is a good Father who cares for those that matters to Him.

1. Jesus said that when we're facing thoughts of what we'll eat and drink (how we'll survive) we should look at the birds and flowers. They have life's necessities because God takes care of them, and we matter more to our Father than birds and flowers.

2. The word translated "take no thought" (don't worry or be anxious) comes from a word that has the idea of being distracted. Don't let what's going on around you distract you from your Heavenly Father and His goodness.

b. Rather than engaging in anxious speculation about what the future holds if so-and-so gets elected, we'd be better served by building our faith and confidence in God's power and provision.

D. Conclusion: Most of us believe that one or both candidates will enact policies that may alter our lives in a big way. But always remember that none of this is bigger than God and that people's eternal fate matters more than their political viewpoint.

1. If you learn to keep your focus on God's Word and the big picture it will give you hope even in the midst of increasingly chaotic times.

2. Part of the increasing chaos of the final years of this age will come from people group against people group. If you keep your focus on the big picture it will prevent you from getting into strife and discord with brothers and sisters in the Lord.

3. A right perspective will also help you shine the light of Jesus more effectively to those around you who are still trapped in darkness. Lots more next week!