

“Evangelical Unity”

Sermon Notes

- **Christian unity has fallen on hard times of late, but will be absolutely mission-critical for us into the days ahead**

**3 observations regarding Christian unity in the 21st century...*

1. Gospel-driven unity in Christ’s church is totally underrated (vv.17-20a; Psalm 133:1; John 17:20-21; Philippians 1:27; 2:2)

2. Gospel-driven unity in Christ’s church routinely under attack (vv.20b-25; Acts 5:1-11; 9:19-31; 15:1-35, 36-41; 20:29-30; 21:12-14)

3. Gospel-driven unity in Christ’s church is worth every effort we make to maintain it (v.26; Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-13; Acts 4:32; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

Next Week: Acts 21:27-36 - “All The City Was Stirred Up”

MEFC Community Group Study Guide

For the week of November 3rd-9th

In view of the significance of this week's election, our community group study materials consist of a recent article written by Greg Strand who serves as the Executive Director for Theology and Credentialing in the Evangelical Free Church of America. Greg's article, titled: "Political Elections: Truths to Remember, Confessions to Be Made, and Prayers to Pray",¹ functions as a compass to reorient us to the timeless truths of our faith as we pray over them together in community. Please enjoy this resource in your own devotional time, with you family, or alongside your community group this week. Brothers and sisters, let us pray!

One has said that as Christians, it is exciting to take the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other and observe the unfolding drama of the ages, the plan and purposes of God being fulfilled. Another rightfully critiqued and more accurately stated this as an encouragement to read both the Bible and the newspaper, and then a reminder or exhortation to interpret the newspaper from the Bible.

With social media feeds today, and the algorithms to feed and flood news channels, this exhortation becomes an important reminder. This is especially true during this presidential election year. Could it be that too many Christians are more committed to the news cycle than the Scriptures? Or that the Bible is being interpreted through social media feeds?

My neighbor stated he is counting the days until the election is over so all the media noise will be over and done. I reminded him it is quite likely the noise will continue even after November 5.

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<https://blogs.efca.org/posts/political-elections-truths-to-remember-confessions-to-be-made-and-prayers-to-pray> . Access 11/1/24 @ 7:30pm.

Where We Stand in the EFCA

In a declaration made a year ago, [Where We Stand in the EFCA: Denials and Affirmations](#), we addressed important truths in how we understand and engage in politics as Christians. It is timely to articulate them again:

As Christians, Jesus rules and reigns over all, and our commitment to Him transcends and transforms every other rule and relationship.

- We are *not* “Christian Nationalists” who believe the federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation or who believe that Americans are “God’s chosen people,” *but* we do believe that a patriotic love of one’s nation is appropriate and that Christians should be good citizens who may freely advocate for God-honoring public policies.
- We do *not* believe that political means can establish the kingdom of God, *but* we do believe that God has appointed governing authorities to do good and that, for citizens in Christ’s kingdom, King Jesus’ rule and reign transcends all other citizenships and partisan ideologies and transforms how we live in the world.

We are not “Christian Nationalists,” and we do not believe political means will establish the Kingdom of God. As Christians, Jesus rules and reigns over all, and our commitment to Him transcends and transforms every other rule and relationship. Additionally, living under His Lordship also means we are good and godly citizens, and we seek to live out and affirm God-honoring public policies, believing that is the way of human flourishing which is for the common good.

Affirming policies regarding morality, revealed by God in His Word, and seeking to uphold them through political processes does not mean one is a Christian Nationalist, as some would claim. Rather, it reflects faithfulness and fidelity to God and His Word and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ in all of life, not just one’s private life or even just the life of the church (even though there are different biblical mandates and Christian responsibilities in each of those realms).

The election

In one week, many will be either rejoicing or weeping, celebrating or despairing because of the results of the U.S. presidential election. This reveals a misplaced hope, and yet it also provides Christians with an opportunity to share the love of Christ and hope of the gospel with others. Although we are in the world, we are not of the world. As Paul reminds us, “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:20).

Until the election, and then after, our posture is to be that of humble dependence on the Lord and His wise, good, providential plan. This means, based on the truth of God and His Word, we experience heart-filled joy, certain hope and patient endurance, which is grounded in the Lord, not circumstances, which sustains us in and through any and all circumstances. And the heart of this posture is prayer.

Prayer

Recently someone posed this question followed by an exhortation: “Do you spend as much time praying for the civil magistrate, praying for the transformation of society as you do ranting and tweeting about it? If you don't, I suggest you change the priorities in your political approach because this is a spiritual battle, and the weapons ultimately therefore are spiritual weapons.”

As Christians, we are exhorted, first and foremost, to pray that God's kingdom will come and His will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10).

We are exhorted to pray. S.D. Gordon reminds us, “You can do more than pray after you have prayed but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.” As Christians, we are exhorted, first and foremost, to pray that God's kingdom will come and His will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10). Furthermore, we are also exhorted to pray for our leaders and those in authority over us (1 Tim 2:1-4).

Prayer is not perfunctory and passive. It is the heart of communion with God and foundational to our engaging in the work of God. The fact that we do not engage prayer with this in mind reflects our misunderstanding of God, prayer, and our role/response and the most fruitful and effective way to approach politics, the public square and culture.

Truths to remember, confessions to be made and prayers to pray

How, then, shall we approach the election and impact of the election, which will carry on long after this formal election? What follows are six truths for us to consider, confessions to be made and prayers to pray. Even though these are important in this election season, you will notice that the election is not the only matter addressed. As C. S. Lewis stated so well, “You can’t get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first.” This is written personally, a prayer each one can pray individually, which is why the personal pronoun “I” is used. This prayer may also be used in corporate worship settings, where the singular “I” can be replaced with “we.”

1. God is sovereign. Remember the words of Psalm 2:1-4: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.” God is sovereign over all the nations and peoples and kings and rulers. He is sovereign over the election process and the candidates.

- *Thanks:* I thank You, LORD God, that You are sovereign over all.
- *Confession:* Forgive me, LORD God, I have looked at and to the nations and the peoples and their plotting, and I have taken my eyes off of You.
- *Intercession:* Our Father and our God, help me to believe (in) you and to trust You are the One who sits in the heavens, and there is nothing that can or will remove You from Your throne.

2. God providentially governs all things. God’s providence is good. He knows the beginning and the end and everything in between. And this knowledge is not just a good guess, but it is personal and planned. Consider Proverbs 21:1: “The

king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.”

- *Thanks*: I thank You, LORD, for Your providential and purposeful plan, which does not change and will be fulfilled.
- *Confession*: Forgive me, LORD, I have not trusted that You are good, or that Your providential and purposeful plan is good, which has resulted in trusting in self or in others to fulfill that plan.
- *Intercession*: Our Father and our God, enable me to see who You are, so I can have perspective of how to understand the present and live faithfully now with an eye to eternity, that I would live by faith.

3. God sovereignly and providentially puts governments and rulers in place.

Paul writes, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Rom 13:1). This addresses God’s sovereignty and providence, which are doctrinal truths about God and His unfolding plan. But these truths are not abstract. They are lived out in real-time in a real place. For Paul, he wrote at a time during which Christianity was not acceptable and Christians were persecuted.

- *Thanks*: I thank You, God, that Your providential and purposeful plan not only affects life in general, the big-picture issues, but it is detailed and personal, such that there is no authority except from You.
- *Confession*: Forgive me, God, when I chafe under authority, and my tendency to complain and grumble when things do not go my preferred way and I seek to take matters into my own hands.
- *Intercession*: Our Father and our God, help me to live faithfully under Your sovereign authority and the Lord Jesus Christ, and help me to live obediently under God-given authority (and give me wisdom to know when we must obey God rather than man).

The kingdom of man is marked by a crown, a theology of glory. And although we not deny a crown and glory, they only come through the cross.

4. We remember we serve a King, the King of kings and Lord of lords, in His kingdom. Although this world is significant in that it is God’s creation and

though fallen it is being redeemed (Rom 8:18-25), this world is not ultimate. God is unfolding His plan in and through history. Although there is God-given authority (Rom 13), there is also God-usurped authority (Rev 13). In the now and the not-yet of the kingdom, we do not wring our hands as if things are out of control. We do not become anxious because our preferred political candidate or party is not on the “throne.” The reason is because God remains on the throne.

The way in which we live and respond these days reflects and reveals a great deal about what we believe about God and His plan. Do we believe we have to usher in God’s kingdom, or help it along by ensuring the right people get in office? If we do, we are working to establish a kingdom of man, not the kingdom of God (Gen 11). It is in response to God’s judgment of the nations that John writes of Jesus, “On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16).

- *Thanks:* I thank You, King and Lord, that You are the King, that You are the Lord, and personally that You are my King and Lord, and that You have established Your kingdom, and that through Christ, I am a member of that kingdom.
- *Confession:* Forgive me, King and Lord, for thinking and acting as if I am of the world, that my ultimate citizenship is on earth, not heaven, that I place more trust and hope in a politician or political party, and that I have lost sight of the kingdom that will have no end.
- *Intercession:* Our Father and our God, I believe, help my unbelief. You are the King and Lord of my life, so please enable me to live in a way that reflects that truth in the midst of and after the election, that I would be salt and light to my family, church and neighborhood, and through my lips and life I would reflect that I joyfully and obediently serve the King of kings and Lord of lords.

5. This kingdom of God is marked by a cross. This means God’s kingdom is an upside-down kingdom in which the weak are strong and the strong are weak, since God’s power is made manifest and is grace made sufficient in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9-10). In contrast, the kingdom of man is marked by a crown, a theology of glory. And although we do not deny a crown and glory, they only come through the cross. This world, and those who live by the ways of the world, desire the crown and glory apart from the cross. How much have we been influenced by and bought into this idea, especially when we consider the power associated with a political machine or majority?

- *Thanks*: I thank You, Lord, for enabling me to understand true life is a cross-centered life, that resurrection follows crucifixion, that life is found in death, that Your power is made manifest through my weakness, because Your grace is sufficient, which has been supernaturally revealed to me.
- *Confession*: Forgive me, Lord, for thinking that life is found in avoiding the cross, that life is somehow found in avoiding death, that my way of living and my understanding of life is better than Yours.
- *Intercession*: Our Father and our God, help me to remember that I will never experience true life or flourish apart from your divine design. And the true life the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, came to give only comes through death, death to self. Discipleship in the Kingdom of God transforms the way I see, understand and live in the kingdom of the world. This has profound implications for how I engage in and respond to politicians, political parties and political ideologies, as I live under the cross, which is the most powerful, though counter-intuitive to the world, means of living in but not of the world. Help me, Lord.

We do not despair or wring our hands based upon a president or political expediency. We hope in God.

6. We trust in the Lord and His promises and place our hope in Him and His plans. Our response and engagement are to trust in the Lord and hope in Him. Trust is not only affirming all the truths associated with God and His Word, but also living our lives, speaking, engaging in this world based upon those truths. It is those who wait on the Lord who will renew their strength (Isa 40:28-31).

This sort of life, a life given to those by faith, manifests the gospel, the kingdom, a life marked by faith. This means the following: those who have been made righteous by faith, they also live by faith (Rom 1:17). This means we do not despair or wring our hands based upon a president or political expediency. We hope in God. And this hope is not a wishful thinking based upon the political winds, but rather it is based on the sure and certain hope and promise given by God (Heb 6:12-20). With Paul we pray, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom 15:13).

- *Thanks*: I thank You, Lord God, You are faithful, unchangeable, and Your promises can be trusted. Thank You that You alone, the God of hope, will, by the power of the Holy Spirit, enable me to abound in hope.
- *Confession*: Forgive me, Lord God, when I take my eyes off of You and trust in myself or others, and exchange earthly hope, be it a president or a political ideology, which results in desperation and despair, for Your sure and certain promises, which bring sure and lasting hope. Forgive me for thinking that waiting on the Lord is a waste of time and a mark of weakness rather than strength.
- *Intercession*: Our Father and our God, in this election season, and beyond, may I trust in You, and may my life be lived in a manner that reveals first things are kept first things, that I would seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness. In my restlessness, enable me to wait on You, so that rather than being desperate or despairing, my strength will be renewed. Whatever happens in the election, and whatever the impact will be, may I, by the power of the Holy Spirit, abound in hope.

In closing, here are two important reminders from John in the Book of Revelation. In the midst of the beast making war against the saints, John encourages the believers in the present moment: “Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints” (Rev 13:10). And finally, John encourages us to live faithfully now with an eye to the future (Rev. 11:15-17): “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, ‘We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.’”

Amen!