



Discipleship & Politics?

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DISCIPLESHIP & POLITICS?

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INTRODUCTION

For many people, discipleship and politics don't go together. Discipleship, after all, is always associated with the realm of the spiritual. It belongs in the same category as worship, spiritual disciplines, and prayer. Politics, on the other hand, is perceived to belong in the secular realm. In the minds of many, these two shouldn't be connected.

But they are.

Christians are called to be the salt and light of the world. Salt for its preservation and flavoring effect; and light for its illumination of dark spaces. For salt to be useful, it has to rub with the food it is preserving. For light to benefit anyone, it has to shine in the midst of darkness.

The imagery Jesus used to describe our Christian mandate to the world is instructive in many ways. Christians who are called to be the salt and light of the world must be right in the midst of that world—working and engaging, not hiding or withdrawing. This implies that the social aspect of our Christian call necessitates our active engagement and faithful presence in the world. The people of God must be found right in the middle of culture and society bearing witness to the gospel of Christ.

This is the heart behind this Victory group material. To bear witness to Christ is to shine the light of Christ in all the spheres of our lives, including politics and civil government. We believe that while our faith is deeply heartfelt and personal, it will eventually radiate into everything we do in public. Christian discipleship, then, blossoms and bears fruit in the public square.

So whether we are talking about fake news, vote buying, social media use, or dealing with victory or loss after the polls close, we do so with the salt and light mandate in mind. May the gospel of Christ that we hold dear in our hearts find its expression in the practical affairs of our civic engagement.

Other materials available for Victory groups, which can provide a foundational understanding of God's kingdom and our role, are:

- *Kingdom & Discipleship*
- *God & Government*
- *Connected*
- *Politics & Christian Participation*

1 All About Fake News

WARM-UP

- On average, how much time do you spend online every day? Which sites or apps do you use the most?
- What are the determining factors on whether you will watch or read something online?
- What was the worst fake news you encountered or saw online?

WORD *¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" ²And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* **GENESIS 3:1-5**

The truth matters.

This is especially true for followers of Jesus. If there's ever a group of people on earth who should be known for truth-telling, it's the Christians. We are a people of the book—our Bible reveals the highest ethical standards of integrity and the entire Christian faith is hinged on the truthfulness of the words of Christ. Our faith must therefore be known for the truth we bear witness to. But that is not always the case today. If you are on social media, you know how anyone can fall victim to fake news, conspiracy theories, and all kinds of half-truths and lies.

The problem with lies is as old as humanity itself. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, the snake insinuated, “*Did God actually say . . . ?*” It was a clever question meant to grab attention and sow seeds of doubt. Satan did not blatantly oppose God’s words—at least not at first. He pretended to only ask a question. And when the tempter saw that the woman didn’t push back but instead misquoted God’s words, he launched the biggest lie of all—“*You will not surely die.*”

The world today is broken because of that one lie.

This should give us all a pause. The story of Adam and Eve tells us of the cosmic devastation that resulted from a single lie. Its damage is so huge that God’s method of overturning the lies necessitated the death of His Son, Jesus. This is why truth matters, whether grand biblical truths or factual matters of daily living. And this brings us back to the problem of fake news—along with misinformation and disinformation—which stands opposite to the truth of the Christian message.

The Gospel of John gives us two reasons we should be cautious about fake news:

1 | We serve a God of truth.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” **JOHN 14:6**

The biggest reason Christians should be cautious about fake news is because we serve a God of truth. The Bible says that it is impossible for Him to lie (Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2) and no deceit is ever found in His mouth (Isaiah 53:9; 1 Peter 2:22).

How have you learned to counter fake news? Why is this important?

2 | Satan is the father of lies.

³⁹They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, ⁴⁰but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. ⁴¹You are doing the works your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God." ⁴²Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. ⁴³Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." JOHN 8:39-44

Jesus had a fascinating argument with some Jews where He said that the truth will set them free (John 8:32). The Pharisees took issue with that and claimed that they had never been enslaved because they were Abraham's children. What followed next was a noteworthy interplay between truth and lies. Jesus argued that if they really were Abraham's children, why would they seek to kill Him when He is only telling them the truth? The real reason for their murderous attitude, Jesus said, was because they take after the father of lies, the devil himself, who *doesn't stand in the truth because there is no truth in him*.

This is an astounding pronouncement from the mouth of Jesus. He was saying that the sharp contrast between God and the devil is hinged on the issue of truth. The devil is a liar and he is the father of lies; Jesus is the God of truth and He speaks only the truth. One of the tell-tale signs of the followers of the devil is seen in the way they stand in opposition to the truth of Christ.

Here are some of the practical things we can do to promote truthfulness in our online engagements:

- Fact-check first. Be wary of news items that do not come from legitimate sources.
- Share only what is true and helpful to others. Making sure it's helpful is just as important as making sure it's truthful. Do not sow intrigue and discord.
- Be patient. Avoid hot takes about developing news stories. When details are scarce, hold off your opinions for a bit.
- Be open for correction. When your post is proven to be false, graciously admit the error and delete.

The biblical admonition to *be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger* (James 1:19) is the ancient equivalent of listening patiently, keeping our mouths shut until we have all the facts, and tempering our extreme reactions. Yes, we care about being truthful, but we also do it in a way that is winsome and gracious. We don't always need to have a say on controversial issues. Sometimes, the wisest thing a Christian can do is to be quiet. If you must speak out to offer correction, do so with gentleness and respect. Why is being patient in your online engagement harder than it looks? How are patience, kindness, and self-control possible?

APPLICATION

- What do you think happens when we condone lies, half-truths, and fake news? What do you think happens when we value the truth? How do you want to live, starting today?
- How do you do fact-checking? What is your way of making sure you are not sharing fake news online?
- How do you graciously deal with close friends and family members who post or share fake news?

PRAYER

- Thank God for His word that shows us the truth. Pray that you will speak and value truth, turning away from half-truths, lies, and fake news.
- Ask God to check your thoughts and speech this week. Pray that you would be full of both grace and truth in your thoughts, words, and actions.
- Ask God that you would be filled with the Spirit and the fruit of His Spirit would abound in your life every day. Pray for those you interact with offline and online to encounter God's love through you.

2 The Question of Vote Buying

WARM-UP

- Do you consider yourself to be a confrontational person? Recall an instance explaining this.
- How do you decide if you will do something or not? Take us through a recent decision-making process.
- Tell us about one of the ills in society today that disturbs you the most.

WORD *Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.* **PROVERBS 10:9**

One important ethical concern that Christians need to talk about is the issue of vote buying and selling. Is it morally right to receive money from politicians in exchange for a vote?

Section 261 of the Omnibus Election Code of the Philippines flatly says vote buying and selling are election offenses. That should end our discussion right away. For people who value public virtue, we recognize that our laws pretty much cover the basics of right and wrong in democratic elections. But the question lingers when some qualifications are added to it. What if I get the money but vote for someone else? What if the money given is not to buy a vote but is a simple act of goodwill?

There's a growing body of sociological research going on about vote buying and selling. One of the important findings to date is how differently people perceive the meaning of the monetary exchange. Marginalized people, for example, perceive the exchange not as an economic transaction but as their only opportunity to get anything from people in government. For them, accepting money is a way to stake a rightful claim to the resources that should have been spent on them in the first place.

This nuanced view of the monetary exchange during elections gives us a textured understanding of the plight of the poor and the marginalized. Vote buying and vote selling are illegal acts according to the law of the land. But, the prohibition and the subsequent violations expose the broader issues of inequality and neglect among marginalized people groups. How should Christians graciously handle this tension?

1 | Recognize the complexity of the issue.

1"Judge not, that you be not judged. 2For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 3Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" **MATTHEW 7:1-3**

This is not to condone vote buying and selling. What is wrong is wrong no matter how we justify it. The guardrails of the law must be upheld for the sake of our Christian public witness. But, the wider social context of vote buying and selling forces us to open our eyes and see the plight of the disadvantaged sector of society.

For Christians, this is useful in two ways. First, this helps us view the marginalized with less judgment and more compassion. Second, those of us who are in a position of power could use this information in lobbying for policies to uplift the lives of the poor.

Why are some issues more complex than they seem? How should we view issues like these?

2 | Refuse to participate in the cycle of corruption.

¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. **EPHESIANS 5:11-12**

Vote buying is not an isolated action that someone does in a corner. It is part of a larger ecosystem of corruption that starts even before a politician is in office. When a candidate pays for votes, he or she is not competing fairly, but is using illegal means to get elected. If the candidate is doing something illegal now, who knows what other illegal things he or she will do next once in office?

But, the wrongness of vote buying doesn't stop with the candidates. It goes down to the voters as well. When voters allow their votes to be sold, they eventually help create a society where only candidates with deep pockets can win elections. Ideas, platforms, experience, and virtues are all set aside in favor of money. This is morally wrong.

The Bible offers a word of caution for the people of God: refuse to participate in these works of darkness. Unmask them for what they are. According to Ephesians 5:8, who are we and how are we supposed to walk?

3 | Talk about it with Christian friends.

²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

JOHN 3:20-21

One of the signs that vote buying and selling are wrong is seen in the way we don't talk about it openly in our Christian circles. There's an air of secrecy about it that we can't bear to bring it into the light. The Bible says that *whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God*. This means we have clear consciences before God. Why do you think truth is exposed in the light? How is having a conversation about such topics exposing truth?

APPLICATION

- What would you do if you were offered money or personal gain at the expense of morality and violating your conscience? What do you think would enable you to say no?
- Why do you think a cycle of corruption exists? What is the source, and what is the solution? What is your participation in this?
- How can you set an example for others to follow? What is one thing you will do differently, starting today?

PRAYER

- Thank God for His word that guides and teaches us. As a believer, declare that God's word is the final authority over your life.
- Pray for those in your nation to know God and make decisions that honor Him, not themselves or others.
- Pray for righteous leaders in government who will trust God and do what is right.

3 Engaging on Social Media

WARM-UP

- Tell us about one thing that frustrates you about being online.
- How does online activity complement face-to-face interaction? What are its limitations?
- How would you describe social media to a person from the 1800s? Why?

WORD *¹⁹Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

JAMES 1:19-20

Social media can be a good thing.

Especially in the last few years, most of us have engaged the outside world from the confines of our homes through our smartphones and computers. To a certain extent, we might even say that social media has kept us sane.

The usefulness of social media is felt not just in our personal interactions with friends, but also in our church life. During the lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, the global Church went online all at the same time. Social media enabled us to connect with our discipleship groups in ways that were not possible before.

But whereas social media does so much good to all of us, no one can deny the fact that it also has its share of pitfalls and brokenness. We've seen how people use social media to slander, attack, sow panic and fear, spread disinformation, and cancel people and institutions. This is especially true in religious and political discourses. In order to get to the meat of the news, social

media users have to wade through the muck of memes, hot takes, outrage, and extreme reactions.

Navigating the dark side of social media is a challenging task for Christians who are called to be salt and light in the world. How do we bear witness to the light of Christ when the social media landscape is too toxic?

1 | Remember that behind an avatar is a real person.

³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. EPHESIANS 4:31-32

The biggest deficiency of social media communication is disembodiment. The complex person from the other end of the conversation is only represented to us by a small profile picture or avatar. We see the words, we hear the voice, we sometimes see the video, and yet the person is not physically present. The absence of a living, breathing person in front of us sometimes makes us a bit more intense than usual. Because we don't see the non-verbal cues, we can easily go overboard with our reactions.

Every time we go online, we need to constantly remind ourselves that there's a thinking, feeling human being created in the image of God behind that avatar we are responding to. *Be kind*, Paul says. The reason we need kindness and tenderheartedness in our online interactions is not to look cool in the comments section, but to give the other person dignity and honor Jesus in the process. What do you think being kind means online?

2 | Bring difficult conversations offline.

¹⁹Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. JAMES 1:19-20

At one point or another, social media users have all experienced getting into a heated exchange with someone online. Whether the argument happened in a private chat or on a public forum, the emotional expense is the same. The problem is aggravated by the fact that you don't see the other person's face or hear the person's voice and tone. Friendships have been broken because of this. The unfriending and blocking that follow complicate our relationships.

The Bible admonishes us to listen more, speak less, and slow down in our anger. This is something the Internet is not wired to do. A better way to argue your point is to pick up your phone, call that friend, and discuss the matter level-headedly. The best way, of course, is to meet that friend and talk in person. This is not just for the sake of ironing out wrinkles in our relationships. As Christians, we go a step beyond online interactions to finding opportunities to proclaim the gospel of Christ. Social media engagement, after all, is not an end in itself. It is a bridge to preaching the gospel and demonstrating the love of Christ to people who don't know Him yet.

Why do you think face-to-face interactions matter so much?
How have you known this to be true?

3

Ask yourself the question: Can I go to church and sit side-by-side with a person I disagree with on social media?

⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

COLOSSIANS 3:9-11

Online political discussions are never easy. And doubly so if the discourse involves people from church who happen to oppose your political convictions. It is one thing to argue against a stranger online, walk away, and forget about the whole thing; it is an entirely different thing if the other person is a churchmate whom you will probably sit next to at a worship service. Is your affinity in Christ more important than your political allegiances?

The apostle Paul admonished the Colossian believers to adopt a new way of seeing their brothers and sisters in the Lord. The old allegiances, divisions, and social classes now fade in comparison to our new identity in Christ. Political colors, in other words, do not supersede our bond in Jesus because Jesus is Lord over all the things that separate us. How have you grown in your understanding of this?

APPLICATION

- How do you think a Christian should engage online? What is one thing you will start, stop, or resume doing? Why?
- What are some of the challenges and limitations of online activity? How will you give more value to face-to-face interactions?
- Do you know someone online that you can reach out to and invite to have a conversation this week? How can you point this person to Christ?

PRAYER

- Thank God for technology that allows us to stay connected. Ask God for wisdom on how to use this well.
- Pray that your relationships would grow and thrive, even with those you do not agree with. Ask God for grace and humility.
- Pray for those you interact with online to know Christ and follow Him. Pray you would set a godly example.

4 Winning and Losing: The Morning After the Elections

WARM-UP

- Who is the most competitive person you know? Recall an instance explaining this.
- Tell us about a time when your sports team or group lost. How did you respond?
- What is the biggest contest or activity you have been involved in? What did it entail, and what was your part in it?

WORD ²⁰*Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.* ²¹*He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding . . .”* **DANIEL 2:20-21**

What would you do if and when the candidate you support loses the elections?

That is a fair question. By having democratic elections, we already know that part of the whole election process is the winning of one and the losing of others. This means that when the official election results come out a few days after the polls, many of us will be disappointed.

Nobody likes to lose. But if we ever want to maintain our democratic way of life, we all need to learn to be good losers. And Christians of all people should be the ones to model how to lose well. Our faith, after all, began with what looked like a big loss for Jesus' followers. Crucifixion is not a typical way to start a new religion.

Because our ultimate allegiance belongs to King Jesus, Christians can be heavily involved in the elections and still not be shattered

when their candidate loses. When Daniel saw and understood the dream of king Nebuchadnezzar, he praised God because he finally understood that the shuffling of kings and kingdoms are all guided by the providential hand of God. He may not have liked the politics of his day, but he knew that God's purposes would remain.

This is the Christian posture we need to develop when we participate in elections. We pray for wisdom, we try to know the candidates' platforms and track records, we campaign for our advocacies, we cast our vote with a clear conscience, and we leave the results to the sovereign will of God. When our candidate wins, we celebrate and get on with our lives. When our candidate loses, we feel the pain and move on as well. Today, let's look at how we can do this.

1 Remember that it is God who sovereignly sets up kings.

20" Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. 21He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding . . ." DANIEL 2:20-21

One good thing about the elections is that we have the privilege to be involved in something that God sovereignly does in our nation. While we participate by casting our votes, it is God who determines the final outcome, according to His designs and purposes. This is what Daniel understood when the Lord revealed to him Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Behind the human actions and political power plays is the God who sovereignly works His plans and purposes for our nation. This means that no election result is random. No one gets seated in a position of power by chance. God has a hand in the placement of people in the executive and legislative branches of our government. Even if we don't exactly understand how the plan of God will play out, we can be sure that His plan is good and benevolent for all. As

believers, why should we look to and trust God, not people? Why can we respond to events in our nation with assurance and peace?

2 | We have the same obligation to pray for our leaders.

¹First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior . . . **1 TIMOTHY 2:1-3**

Regardless of the election results, whether our candidates win or lose, the Bible still calls Christians to make all kinds of prayers for kings and other lesser rulers (1 Timothy 2:1-4). This admonition is shocking if you remember that Paul wrote this letter when Nero was the emperor of Rome. Though Nero was tyrannical, immoral, and a persecutor of the church, Paul still called Christians to pray for him and other rulers like him.

Our obligation to pray is not based on whether we like the president of our nation, but on the eternal word of God. What is your commitment in praying for our national leaders? How do you pray for them?

3

We still need to participate in the actual work of building a good society.

³¹He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³²It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

MATTHEW 13:31-32

If your candidate loses in the elections, it is tempting to be so frustrated, quit your civic involvement, and not care about politics anymore. But, our calling to be salt and light to the world is not dependent on politics. The Christian call to bear witness to Christ and the gospel has nothing to do with whoever is in power. History shows over and over again that the church continued to flourish even in evil regimes where the preaching of the gospel has been officially banned. While elections are important, how do the years between these elections matter? As followers of Christ, what do you think our involvement should be in nation building?

APPLICATION

- How will you respond if things don't go your way in your community and nation? What do you think will enable you to trust God's sovereignty?
- What is your commitment in praying for our national leaders and building a good society?
- Think of a few friends who may need to hear this message. How can you encourage them to trust God this week?

PRAYER

- Thank God for His sovereignty, that He is in control no matter what happens and no matter who leads your nation. Declare your trust in Him.
- Pray for wisdom, righteous leadership, and humility for your national leaders. Pray that they would know God and make Him known.
- Pray that the citizens of your nation will work towards building a good society, representing Christ, and making disciples.

³¹He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³²It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

MATTHEW 13:31-32

Discipleship and politics . . . do they really go together?

The answer is a resounding yes! Just like the seed in this parable, the kingdom of heaven has an enormous impact in every aspect of our lives. God has called to the church to preach the gospel and make disciples of all people in all areas of life.

Discipleship & Politics? aims to bear witness to Christ by shining His light in all the spheres of our lives, including politics and civil government. As disciples of Christ, it should be clear for us that the social aspect of our call necessitates our active engagement and faithful presence in the world. By faithfully carrying out His mandate to go and make disciples, even in the area of politics, we become the salt and light God called us to be.

TOPICS

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